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Speaker: Honourable Paul Lane, MHA

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The House met at 1:30 p.m.

SPEAKER (Lane): Order, please!

Admit strangers.

I rise to rule on a point of privilege raised by the Leader of the Third Party on Thursday, March 5, 2026.

In raising the point of privilege, the Member referenced the level of noise in the House and the interactions between some Members who were not recognized to speak. The Member raises the point of privilege based on the freedom of speech enjoyed by Members of this hon. House and their right to be heard in debate.

In *House of Commons Procedure and Practice, Fourth Edition*, parliamentary privilege is stated to refer to the rights, powers and immunities granted to the House and its Members to protect them from undue interference so they can carry out their constitutional and parliamentary functions to legislate, deliberate and hold the government to account.

I accept that, as required, this point of privilege was raised at the earliest opportunity, given the matter arose out of proceedings in the House. Previous notice was not required.

The Speaker's role now is to determine whether a prima facie question of privilege exists, that is whether at first blush the issues raised do indeed concern a collective or individual privilege of the House or its Members.

In considering this point of privilege, I have examined the individual privileges of the Members of this House. Freedom of speech is certainly one of the core privileges accorded to Members, which they require to legislate, deliberate and hold the government to account. Another privilege accorded to Members individually is freedom from obstruction and interference

so that they may perform their parliamentary duties.

In reviewing this matter, I have also examined the *Standing Orders* of the House, in particular Standing Orders 44 and 49. Standing Order 44 requires Members to address themselves to the Speaker and not to each other. Standing Order 49 prohibits the use of offensive language by one Member against another.

At paragraph 3.65 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, it states, "Freedom of speech is governed by the rules of procedure adopted by the House, which it alone can modify. During debate as well as during question period and other House proceedings, members are bound by the Standing Orders and practices of the House with respect to the content of speeches and remarks. A further limitation on the freedom of speech of members is provided by the authority of the Speaker under the Standing Orders to preserve order and decorum and, when necessary, to order a member to resume their seat if engaged in irrelevance or repetition in debate, or to name a member for disregarding the authority of the Chair and ordered them to withdraw."

The text also references a statement of Speaker Fergus of the House of Commons in October 2023, about order and decorum, where he said he was "committed to protecting the individual privilege of freedom of speech necessary for our debates." Speaker Fergus also called on Members to choose their words with care and avoid mocking Members or making pointed criticisms in a way that is unnecessarily personal and designed to denigrate, bully or attack the integrity of the person.

Similarly, in a ruling on March 14, 2013, in this hon. House, Speaker Wiseman stated, "Whenever we have multiple people not recognized in debate contributing to the conversation, it tends to be personal and it tends to be emotional and detracting from

the main focus of the debate, and we end up with disorder in the House.”

I also refer to a ruling by Speaker Reid in this hon. House, on October 8, 2020, in which he stated, “I draw Members’ attention to the fact that language and tone used in debate is a choice and they do matter. Members of the House are bound by a Code of Conduct and we have all sworn an oath or affirmed that we will govern ourselves in accordance with it.”

Speaker Reid also referred to the Harassment-Free Workplace Policy that had recently been adopted by the House, and noted that, “... while the policy does not apply to our interactions within this Chamber given parliamentary privilege and the related freedom of speech that Members enjoy, I see no reason why the principles accepted by the House and adopted in policy should not apply to debate here as well.”

I find, as Speaker Wiseman and Speaker Reid above, that there is no point of privilege in the matter raised by the Leader of the Third Party. It is, however, a serious matter of order and decorum.

As we embark on the second week of this 51st General Assembly, I am once again asking all Members to respect each other and to respect the authority of the Chair. I am also asking all parliamentarians to respect the dignity of this institution of parliament. I realize that last week marked the first time that all Members have been together in this hon. House since a very competitive provincial general election. I realize many Members are trying to find their footing and establish themselves in this new assembly. I realize we have a number of new Members. I realize we are all passionate about our districts and the people we represent.

I do not want to take away from that passion or stifle debate. There are many important issues, challenges and opportunities that

concern the people of our province, and we need questions – sometimes tough questions – to be asked and answers provided. We need good, passionate, robust debate.

This much-needed discourse can all be achieved in a respectful manner. It can be done without talking over one another. It can be done without rhetoric. It can be done without shouting or hurling personal insults.

As Speaker of this hon. House, it is my responsibility to encourage and allow for the free flow of debate and ideas within the bounds of the *Standing Orders* of this House of Assembly. In doing so, I have a responsibility of ensuring the decorum and dignity of this sacred institution is maintained. That’s exactly what I intend on doing.

It’s my sincere hope that we can all move forward in the spirit of co-operation and respect for this House and for those who have given us the privilege to serve here.

Should Members choose to continue down the road of disruption and disrespect, as I indicated last Thursday, I will have no choice but to take more definitive action.

I thank all Members for your anticipated co-operation.

In our Speaker’s gallery, I would like to welcome Dr. Avrum Richler, to the gallery. Dr. Richler will be celebrating his 100th birthday next week and will be the subject of a Member’s statement today.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Dr. Richler is being accompanied by Jonathan Richler and Gladys Dalton.

Welcome.

In the public gallery today, I would like to welcome Margaret “Muggs” Tibbo from

Parasport Newfoundland and Labrador who is the subject of a Member's statement today.

I would also like to welcome several other members of Parasport Newfoundland and Labrador who are joining Ms. Tibbo: Doug Copp, Gail Eldridge, Joanne MacDonald, Lois Martin, Joe Philpott, Paul Philpott, Frances Philpott, Jeremy Jones, Claire McCarthy and Nicole McCarthy.

Welcome.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: I would also like to welcome back our returning Page, Emma Harris.

Welcome back, Emma.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

Statements by Members

SPEAKER: Today, we have Members' statements by the hon. Members for the Districts of Mount Scio, Placentia - St. Mary's, Placentia West - Bellevue, St. George's - Humber and St. John's Centre.

The hon. the Member for Mount Scio.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Speaker.

I'm delighted to recognize Dr. Avrum Richler who is celebrating 100 years young on March 15, 2026.

Dr. Richler was born and raised in the Jewish quarter of Montreal. He served in the Canadian Forces and received his Bachelor of Optometry in 1947, his Doctor of Optometry in 1960, and he entered the American Academy of Optometry in 1965.

When Avrum started his career, his specialty was using corrective glasses to help children with dyslexia and learning disabilities.

Dr. Richler moved to Newfoundland and Labrador in 1967 and set up practice at 732 Water Street. In 1979, he earned a Ph.D. from Memorial's Faculty of Medicine and convoked at the same time as one of his five children, who was also receiving an MD at that session.

Throughout his career, Avrum held clinics across the province including Happy Valley - Goose Bay, Marystown, Placentia and Cow Head.

Avrum is a Newfoundlander and Labradorian by choice. When he wasn't helping generations of patients see the world more clearly, he was passionate about sharing the fun of Passover, Hanukkah and Rosh Hashanah with his family and friends.

Dr. Richler retired when he turned 90. Up until recently, he was living independently, and he is currently working on his memoir, which I know will be full of incredible stories.

Mazel tov, Dr. Richler.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, it is said that if you are a blood donor, then you are a hero to someone who has received your gracious gift of life. Mr. Morley Reid of Blaketown is clearly a hero to many. He has donated blood over 800 times and is a volunteer with the Canadian Blood Services, locally, provincially and nationally.

In 2014, Morley received the honoured volunteer award from the Canadian Blood Services. To be a donor, one can go to www.blood.ca and take the quiz to see if they are a donor candidate.

Morley Reid was a high school educator for 30 years and is presently a volunteer on the Blaketown Old Shop South Dildo Boat Owners Association. He has volunteered with the Crescent Collegiate school council; the Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association, branch and provincial levels; and the Canadian Teachers' Federation. He volunteered with the Lions Club at the local and district levels, the W. H. Newhook advisory committee and the Blaketown Local Service District.

Mr. Morley Reid of Blaketown was also awarded the Confederation 75th Anniversary Medal and the King Charles III Medal given by the House of Commons.

Speaker, please join me as I applaud Morley Reid of Blaketown.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Placentia West - Bellevue.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. DWYER: Thank you, Speaker.

I rise in this hon. House today, Speaker, to say happy birthday to my late father, Dennis Dwyer. Born March 9, 1941, he was the third of 14 children. They were born on Bell Island to Thomas and Maria Dwyer.

My dad was a true gentleman that put his community, friends, faith and family before himself. My dad met the love of his life, my mom, Bernadette Dwyer, née Coady, in Wabush, and as they say, the rest is history.

My parents were wed at the Basilica in St. John's and settled in Marystown, raising my three siblings and I with true love and support.

My dad retired as the repair manager of the Marystown Shipyard, and after 20-plus years in that position, he started a

hydraulics and plumbing business that still exists today.

He was also instrumental in getting an arena built in Marystown while taking on volunteer positions of recreation director, minor hockey president, coach and took great pride in being a member of the Kinsmen Club, ultimately becoming an honorary lifetime member.

He was very proud of his nine grandchildren who he gave generously of his time and advice.

I ask all hon. colleagues to join me in wishing my dear old dad a happy birthday today.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for St. George's - Humber.

H. CORMIER: Thank you, Speaker.

I rise today to recognize the 60th anniversary of the Pasadena Lions Club.

For 60 years, this dedicated group of volunteers has been a cornerstone of the Pasadena community. Through fundraising initiatives, support for local families, sponsorships of youth and recreation programs and assistance to those facing medical challenges, the Lions have consistently demonstrated their commitment to service above self.

Their motto, We Serve, is not just a phrase; it is a principle they have lived by since 1966. Generations of members have stepped forward to give their time, energy and compassion to make their town a better place to live.

Milestones like this are not achieved without dedication, team work and a strong sense of community spirit. The impact of the Pasadena Lions Club can be measured not

only in dollars raised or projects completed, but in the lives they touched along the way.

I ask all Members of this House to join me in congratulating the Pasadena Lions Club on 60 years of outstanding service and to thank past and present members for the continued leadership and generosity.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for St. John's Centre.

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

This past January, Margaret Tibbo was invested into the Order of Newfoundland and Labrador, recognizing her 40 years of dedication to parasports and inclusion.

Her dedication grew from working with people with challenges to facilitate their inclusion. Working in Corner Brook, in 1978, got her involved in paraskiing. Later, as director of recreation and volunteers with the children's rehabilitation centre, Margaret continued to create opportunities, support instructors, acquire sports equipment and support para athletes from the grassroots to the Paralympic level.

Margaret appreciates Dr. Norman Lush, Linda Nickerson, Joanne MacDonald, Mel Fitzgerald and others, who laid the foundation on which she was able to build.

Knowing a child with a disability is able to join a class ski trip because of specially trained instructors and volunteers; seeing a child ski down a hill and hearing a parent joyfully say: I'm a ski mom; knowing a 50-plus-year old with a spinal cord injury can cross-country ski with his family; celebrating para athletes at the Newfoundland and Labrador Games, Canada Games, national competitions and the Paralympics are the greatest rewards for Margaret. She says it's pretty awesome to be part of it.

Please join me in recognizing Margaret Tibbo's dedication to making sport truly inclusive.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Statements by Ministers.

Statements by Ministers

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Labrador Affairs.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. EVANS: Speaker, last night I participated in the opening of the 2026 Labrador Winter Games.

For over 40 years, the Labrador Winter Games have been far more than a sporting event. It's a link to the knowledge, resilience and ingenuity of our communities that have been built across many Labrador generations.

Growing up in Makkovik, I had the privilege of competing in the Labrador Winter Games, so it was an honour, Speaker, to welcome athletes, families and visitors to this year's celebration of our shared Labrador spirit.

The provincial government is a proud supporter of the games, which reflect the values that define life in the North: endurance, adaptability, focus and a deep respect for the land and for one another. Whether it's a skill passed down from the elders, being able to snowshoe, being able to shoot, be able to boil a kettle in 10 feet of snow, or an athletic pursuit refined through training and discipline, every event embodies the same determination that has helped Labradorians thrive in a demanding, harsh environment.

For our young athletes, these games offer the chance to step into a proud tradition that celebrates cultural heritage while embracing our future. For the returning competitors,

these games serve as a reminder of the friendships formed, the lessons learned and the unforgettable moments shared together.

I'd like to congratulate Pauline Russell for her leadership as the board's chair of directors; also, Speaker, to the board. To the board: You have accomplished a tremendous feat to bring together all of Labrador to celebrate and compete. These games provide the opportunity for every single community in Labrador to come together, to be truly together for all of Labrador, united, sharing and competing.

So, yes, Board, to you, you've succeeded and really made a tremendous difference.

To the volunteers, organizers and supporters, thank you for your time and effort and love that you put in to keeping these games vibrant and meaningful year after year.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Gander.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. FORD: Thank you.

Speaker, I join the Member in celebrating the opening of the 2026 Labrador Winter Games. These games are truly one of the most unique sporting traditions in our province. For more than four decades, they have brought together communities from across Labrador to celebrate sport, culture and connection.

The Labrador Winter Games are about more than competition. Many events reflect skills rooted in life on the land and traditions passed down through generations. That a blend of athletic achievement and cultural heritage is what makes these games so special and so important to Labrador

communities. Often these are called the friendship games, as they are an opportunity for people of all ages to represent their communities, build lifelong friendships and strengthen the bonds that connect communities all across the Big Land.

I know that the hon. Lisa Dempster would like to be here today delivering this ministerial response herself, but she is at the Labrador Games. She's so pleased to have pointed out that the previous administration added \$250,000 to the games because of their importance.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. FORD: So as critic for Sport, I want to recognize the volunteers, organizers and leaders who make this event possible year after year.

To all the athletes competing, best of luck and enjoy the experience.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: I would just remind the hon. Member that we don't use the names of Members.

Thank you.

The hon. the Leader of the Third Party.

J. DINN: I thank the minister for an advance copy of this statement.

On behalf of my colleague and the New Democratic Party, I congratulate all athletes on their performance.

We also want to recognize and thank all volunteers, supporters and organizers, without whom this event could not happen.

Finally, we call on government to make sports more affordable and accessible for

everyone in this province, especially those living in more remote areas where travel can be particularly expensive.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Social Supports and Well-Being; Housing; and Poverty Reduction.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. WALL: Thank you, Speaker.

I am pleased to rise and acknowledge March as Social Work Month.

In this House, we often hear about people facing challenges, whether it's illness, financial struggles or families who need extra support. In moments of crisis, social workers are often the ones who offer comfort, guidance and practical solutions.

One such social worker is Debbie Lavers O'Neil, practicing for more than 30 years in focus areas such as child, youth and family services, community supports and mental health services. Colleagues describe Debbie as being kind, knowledgeable, empathetic and guided by integrity. A young social worker once recalled accompanying Debbie on a home visit to a single mother of three. As they chatted, Debbie picked up a broom and swept the floor. A simple gesture that reassured the mother that they were there to help, demonstrating the importance of human connection.

Throughout her career, Debbie earned her Master of Social Work degree, continued to study independently and strongly supported ongoing training for staff. For her outstanding service, she has been named a Pride in the Profession Award recipient by the Newfoundland and Labrador College of Social Workers.

Mr. Speaker, I invite all Members in this hon. House to join me in recognizing her achievements and the vital work of all social workers throughout Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Thank you, Speaker.

I rise today to join in recognizing March as Social Work Month, and to acknowledge the vital work of social workers.

Every day social workers support individuals and families facing some of life's most difficult challenges. Whether assisting children and youth, supporting seniors, helping families or working in mental health and community services, their work requires compassion, expertise and an extraordinary commitment to others.

Across our province, social workers serve on the front lines of our health and social support systems. They advocate for vulnerable people, help connect individuals to critical services, and often step in during moments of profound difficulty in people's lives.

As we mark Social Work Month, I encourage the government to continue building on that work, supporting the profession, investing in training and recruitment, and ensuring social workers have the resources they need to continue serving the people of this province.

To every social worker across Newfoundland and Labrador, thank you for your care, professionalism and dedication you bring to your work every day.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Leader of the Third Party.

J. DINN: I thank the minister for an advance copy of the statement, and we would like to take this opportunity to thank all social workers serving the people of our province.

As MHAs, we appreciate what goes into the profession, and we recognize the importance of what social workers do. That is why we call on this government to redouble efforts to recruit social workers. One way to entice more people into the profession would be to recognize work terms as work, and pay social work students for their work terms.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Oral Questions.

Oral Questions

SPEAKER: The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are rightly outraged that the Premier has decided to use more than a quarter of a million dollars of MCP funds every year – money that we all know is meant for health care – to pay to receive political advice. This is categorically wrong.

Will the Premier admit that this is wrong, and stop this inappropriate payment scheme?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: Speaker, since being elected and even before we were elected, during the election, we talked about the need to reach out to people that actual

work in the system to get the best advice we can when it comes to trying to fix our system.

We all understand that, after 10 years, we now have the worst health outcomes in the entire country. So I've done that, I've reached out and hired people and brought in people right directly from the people that are involved in the health care system –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: – to help us change policy and help improve the lives of people in Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

I guess I'd ask the Premier to confirm today what his answer has been publicly, that the MCP funds are being used to pay for administrative work, just like doctors working in the Department of Health or NLHS.

So can the Premier confirm that this staffer is only working on health care files, which is what he just spoke about in the answer to the first question?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: Speaker, this particular individual is providing policy advice to the Premier's office on health care matters that will impact the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

We got elected to improve access to health care, which is exactly what we're doing. I can give you an example of that; that's why

we have turned around and said that, from now on, when our first budget comes out, nobody in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador will have to pay for medical transportation any more. We will cover it 100 per cent.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

I didn't get the answer, so I'll try it a different way.

The contract, which is for political staff, says duties are – and I quote – those duties normally performed by the special advisor to the Premier and any other duties and responsibilities as may be assigned from time to time by the Premier.

The Premier did say he was getting advice about health care, but is the staffer being assigned duties other than health care? I'll give the opportunity to the Premier to specifically answer that question.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: Speaker, let me say again, any time that you have an opportunity to work with someone directly from the health care system, who continues to work in the health care system and provide advice, that's a good day for Newfoundland and Labrador. That's how we improve our access to our health care.

On another note, let me tell you about something else we're doing. We have reached out to the Nurses' Union, and actually received a proposal from them that will eliminate the need for travel nurses in the province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: We will no longer spend \$240 million on outside travel nurses. Working with the Nurses' Union, we're going to have a made-in-Newfoundland-and-Labrador solution.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

There are other individuals and groups in this province that have not been reached out to by Premier, that includes NAPE and AAHP. I would suggest, if they're going to speak to people in this province about health care, they should speak to everybody about health care.

Speaker, I still didn't get an answer to my question so I'll tell Newfoundlanders and Labradorians the truth, because we do have documents that show this staffer was at meetings that had absolutely nothing to do with health care, yet he's being paid by MCP.

So why isn't the Premier being honest about this with the public?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: Speaker, I want to address the preamble. I've already met with NAPE on a couple of occasions, spoken with the president of NAPE on more than one occasion. With the AAHP, there were some challenges with the Labour Relations Board. I was advised not to meet, but I can tell this hon. House that I have a meeting tomorrow morning with AAHP.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

J. HOGAN: Speaker, we're zero for three on responses to this very specific and very important question. The documents that I talked about show, for example, that this staffer is at meetings with the Premier and his meeting with the ambassador for Portugal.

Speaker, I ask the Premier to tell Newfoundlanders and Labradorians why MCP is paying to give advice on meetings with the ambassador. Was the ambassador sick?

Thank you.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: Speaker, we have an opportunity here to try and make health care better. We know where health care is in our province right now. As I spoke to earlier, we have the worst health care outcomes in the entire country. That's what 10 years of Liberal government does to our health care system. We're going to fix it, and we're going to get good people working with us to make that happen.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I still am so confused about what health care has to do with the ambassador of Portugal, so let me ask this question: Will the Premier deny or confirm that the staffer also participated in meetings with the FFAW on January 14, January 20 and February 17?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Energy and Mines.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, this Premier and his staff are listening to everyone. That is what he got elected to do, unlike the Members across the way. It's why they're over there. They don't even have their comments left on, on Facebook, because they don't want to hear what the public has to say.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: Mr. Speaker, this Premier is doing what's best for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians and for health care.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

J. HOGAN: Speaker, that's extremely rich coming from the minister who tells us we don't want to hear comments, yet he says to the media outside in the scrum he has no idea why we would debate anything in the House of Assembly, Speaker.

With all due respect, the minister is certainly entitled to answer these questions, but this is a budget line in the Premier's office, political staff come from the Premier's office, but maybe the minister can say – did this staffer meet with him and the Premier with regard to Bay du Nord on the weekend of February 14?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Energy and Mines.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'll tell you about rich. The Member for Windsor Lake came in here and told people that the building trades shot down a deal that they had; there was no deal. He met with them in June, and it was radio silence since June. He hasn't even talked to the building trades.

He told us that they had a deal for Bay du Nord, and there was no deal for Bay du Nord. There were no negotiations. We talked to the head of Equinor who said that he never met with them. Now they came back in and said they met once but they met in June and, whatever happened in June, they spent the next five months more concerned about an election than they did about the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

J. HOGAN: Again, I know the Premier doesn't want to answer these questions, but we still have more.

We have a partially redacted email from a member of our public service to the former deputy chief of staff to the Premier, Steve Outhouse, which states all positions that are created out of the Premier's Office are on the political support scale.

So why did the Premier overrule the public service and decide to pay a staffer from MCP and create this contract in breach of the rules that he was advised to keep?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: Speaker, I don't know if I'm amused or disappointed, because the Leader of the Opposition obviously forgets that he had a special advisor to the Premier's office sitting in Transportation and Infrastructure. Maybe he didn't know that he had him, but certainly, when I arrived, the first thing I was told was that I had a special advisor sitting over in Transportation and Infrastructure.

I can tell you, Speaker, what we have done is we have started to work for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador to improve their health system, like not having to pay for medical transportation anymore, by working with the Nurses' Union to make sure that they take care of all the need for travel nurses in our province, and that's exactly what we're going to continue to do.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

Again, I'll use the Premier's words to prove my point; that individual, as he said, was sitting in TI, and he was being paid from the Department of TI. He was not being paid from health care funds, which are meant for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HOGAN: On top of that, Speaker, an email was put out to all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, rather than hiring in secrecy, which was done in this case.

So I ask the Premier, for the last time: Apologize to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians and, if you're so focused on health care, commit that MCP dollars will be used for health care and not for political shenanigans.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker.

I need to address the Leader of the Opposition's opening comment. This special

advisor was in the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure, which I occupy. There was an office down there, and I used to go in and I'd see two sets of shoes – a couple of pairs of shoes on the floor. This person was coming in, going back and forth and getting coffee out of our kitchen and not speaking to anyone. Lo and behold, one day I asked, who is this gentleman? He's a special advisor to the Premier. I said, are we paying for him? No, he's been paid from Health.

I say to the Leader of the Opposition, practice what you preach. If you had him in my Department of TI getting paid from Health, what's the difference? Is it a double standard you don't agree with? What's the problem?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Mount Scio.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Speaker.

I ask the Minister of Finance: Do you agree with the Premier that a \$275,000 political staff contract is appropriate? Were you consulted or in any way involved in this appointment?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

C. PARDY: Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: I celebrated the comment of the Leader of the Opposition there last week when he said that we stand for collaboration not confrontation, and I repeated those words.

I would say, when it comes to creating better health care, I would expect that the Opposition would look at us and look at the results and the improvements that would be occurring in health care over our jurisdiction.

Look at the results, and let's not look at confrontation.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Mount Scio.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Speaker.

Can the Minister of Finance confirm whether the special contract was approved by Treasury Board?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: Mr. Speaker, we do lots of collaboration on lots of issues to improve the lives of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: Health care – we do it in lots of realms. On affordability, we do it. We collaborate all the time, and I think we're knowledgeable about a lot of events that occur to make the life better for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. Improving health care will make life better for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Mount Scio.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Speaker.

I would ask the minister again, if he was consulted, if Treasury Board approved it and if the minister thinks that his government is exempt from the political staff salary limits set by the House of Assembly and by the Executive Council?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Energy and Mines.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier has been very transparent on all of this. There's been no attempt to hide any of this. He's been very clear from day one when he was asked.

The individual that's working for the Premier is a very qualified individual. He's here for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, and he's here to support our Premier.

Now, if you want to talk about things that haven't been consulted, we can talk about Snow's Lane, we can talk about Carla Foote, we can talk about all of the past things that this government has done and we can go on forever. The reality is, this individual was hired because he was the best person for this position and we stand by him.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Mount Scio.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Speaker.

I ask the Premier what criteria will be used to determine if this staffer has earned his automatic guaranteed \$13,000 bonus? Will that be evaluated by the Premier or will that be evaluated by the Minister of Health and Community Services, who oversees the MC budget from which this bonus is being paid?

Thank you, Speaker.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure.

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: Speaker, health care is one of the main pillars in our last successful election campaign. Listen, people actually appreciate what we're doing. This individual is part of our plan to fix up the mess we inherited from the current Opposition party on that side of the house.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: We've got a plan in place. He's a big part of our plan. We make no apologies for trying to improve the lives of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Mount Scio.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Speaker.

I think there are also a lot of hard-working public servants across Newfoundland and Labrador who would like to know how they also can get a \$13,000 bonus, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

S. STOODLEY: Does the Minister of Finance believe that this is an appropriate use of MCP funds and that \$275,000 for 28 hours a week is – to use his words – spending smarter?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: Mr. Speaker, we talked about planning effectively and efficiently on making sure that we have big improvements in our health care system.

We noticed that the previous government spent an awful lot of money on travel nurses. I would say that we've already made significant inroads, further inroads, on

reducing the amount of travel nurses that we will be availing of. It's part of the plan.

Where the previous government may not have planned, we have an effective plan in order to reduce the cost associated with health care; spending smarter and also to make it more friendly for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for St. John's West.

K. WHITE: Thank you, Speaker.

Did the Minister of Health know about and approve the \$275,000 contract in the Premier's office or was this done without her knowledge?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Health and Community Services.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. EVANS: Speaker, there seem to be a lot of questions around a staffer in the Premier's office, but I have a lot of questions about a lot of money that was spent without consultation. I have a lot of questions about work that was set up without engaging with the stakeholders, the Nurses' Union, the Nurse Practitioner Association, regarding the nurse practitioner program.

Speaker, we've engaged with stakeholders. They come to my office, and when they meet and talk to us and talk to the Premier, they are shocked at how we actually engage with them. So I think a big part of the picture here is, not about one staffer, but about the lack of engagement for 10 years that created this health care crisis that we're facing.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for St. John's West.

K. WHITE: Speaker, can the government confirm that the staffer did not attend meetings or receive materials relating to confidential government business prior to his contract start date of December 22, 2025?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Health and Community Services.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. EVANS: Speaker, I will say that the staffer they're referring to is actually helping the government right now address a lot of the problems, a lot of the deficits and a lot of the lack of support, when we look at the services that need to be delivered, as opposed to the services that were paid for. We look at 10-year leases, 20-year leases for buildings that are empty, because, in actual fact, recruitment wasn't done, retention wasn't done.

Also, we're looking at huge gaps in services. We look at the air ambulance now. We actually are signed, committed by this past government, into a huge, huge contract that is inadequate, Speaker. We need advice. We need help. We need the engagement, Speaker, because of the mess we've been left to deal with.

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The minister's time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for St. John's West.

K. WHITE: Speaker, the government's information management policy says that confidential information must not be shared with unauthorized personnel. Records released today show that the staffer had access to confidential government

documents before he was employed in the Premier's office.

Will the Minister Responsible for the Office of the Chief Information Officer investigate this data breach?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Health and Community Services.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. EVANS: Speaker, I have to say as the Minister of Health, when I actually went into the office, I was shocked at what actually was laid out in front of me.

What we're going to do now, in the next year, is we're going to communicate those gaps. For example, the travel nurses, Speaker, a huge cost – huge, huge cost – to the government, \$240 million, but I got to say, at \$400,000 a year per travel nurse, there was nothing put in the budget, even though this past government knew they were going to relying on travel nurses.

So, in actual fact, we are dealing with a mess, and, Speaker, I will raise it every time we are questioned about that staffer and I will actually identify these huge gaps in services, the lack of supports –

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The minister's time is expired.

L. EVANS: Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Thank you, Speaker.

Last week, the Conservatives voted to officially cancel the new, badly needed provincial hospital. Yet, as we speak, \$275,000 of our province's health care

budget is being used to pay a staffer for Conservative political advice.

How can the minister explain to the public why she thinks MCP funds should be used for politics and that this is more important than health care for the people of this province?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure.

B. PETTEN: Speaker, this individual was hired to give good advice, and we're using that advice, and the minister states – and it was part of our platform. We cancelled a hospital that was way out of everyone's price range, including this province, when you are going in excess of \$10 billion with less than \$11 billion budget.

We made a sound financial decision and a fiscally smart decision. We're also doing a smart decision on how to manage our health care, and if we have to bring in people that are going to give us good advice to get better health care for the people of this province, we will do just that.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Gander.

B. FORD: Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, will the Minister of Health confirm that children with cleft lip and cleft palate receive 100 per cent coverage under MCP for medically required orthodontic procedures?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Health and Community Services.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. EVANS: Speaker, we see through media that there's a lot of misinformation out there, what's covered under MCP and Dental Association. Speaker, we see a lot of

misinformation, so I've directed Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services to work with MCP to make sure that the information is clear.

Medically, essential cleft lip surgery is covered by MCP, and we will be communicating with parents and patients on what is actually covered, Speaker. We'll make sure that people don't fall through the cracks. That's my commitment as Minister of Health. We will make sure that patients who are suffering and their advocates, their parents, will not actually have to suffer when they get misinformation, Speaker.

Thank you, very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Gander.

B. FORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

If it's true that some patients have fallen through the cracks, why do I have a list of families whose children were also denied coverage?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Minister of Health and Community Services.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. EVANS: Thank you, Speaker.

I mean, unless these denials or the perception of these denials came after October, then it would have to rest with the previous Liberal government. But, Speaker, as the current minister, I will make sure that people don't fall through the cracks when they are eligible to receive the coverage.

So I would actually ask the Member across from me to make sure that information on

those people are communicated to Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services and to MCP so we'll make sure that it's properly addressed, Speaker. We don't want parents out there worrying about their children. We don't want children out there suffering, waiting on surgery, Speaker. We want to make sure no one falls through the cracks.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Gander.

B. FORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The denials actually came about in the same time frame when news broke that the Premier took \$274,000 from MCP for partisan political advice. I have a constituent who was told that MCP's \$11-million budget for orthodontic work is not sufficient to meet the needs that exist.

I ask the minister: Is this true?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Health and Community Services.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. EVANS: Speaker, in terms of health care, there is a deficit. But we will make sure that no child, no person born with a cleft pallet is denied access to MCP. That's my commitment. That's the commitment of the Premier. The Premier actually reached out over the weekend to engage with parents who actually had this concern, Speaker.

We will do government differently. We will make sure communication is there. I ask the Member, if you have a list, why don't you make that list available to us so we can actually work through those and make sure no one (inaudible).

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Harbour Grace - Port de Grave.

P. PARSONS: Thank you, Speaker.

The federal government provides money for health care to this province to be administered through MCP. The purpose of that money is to pay for what people need, not to provide partisan political advice to the Premier.

Is the Minister of Health concerned that the Premier and his political staffer that the contract could be in breach of the *Canada Health Act*?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Health and Community Services.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. EVANS: Speaker, I am dealing with serious issues. I'm dealing with issues where air ambulance contracts were signed that I'm now learning are deficient from this Liberal government.

Speaker, in actual fact, in my district there is erosion of medivacs, the service under this new contract. In actual fact, I'm going back and looking at the work that's been done under that Liberal government to make sure that we are addressing the needs of the patients.

Speaker, our seniors shouldn't suffer, our children shouldn't suffer and also our workers out there actually delivering health care services whether they're with NAPE, the AAHP, the Nurses' Union or the physicians, everybody should be treated with dignity and respect.

I am actually being told that –

SPEAKER: The minister's time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Leader of the Third Party.

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, a recent media story reported astronomical statistics regarding food and housing insecurity or hunger and homelessness; a 30 per cent increase in client visits to one food bank since last year and a 70 per cent increase since 2019. Children under 17 making up 30 per cent of those visits. According to Food First NL, over 15,000 food bank users in the last three months of 2025 alone. There are struggling people behind these numbers.

I ask the Minister of Social Supports and Well-Being, will he implement the basic income to address this crisis and, in the meantime, table a plan to financially support food banks that are on the front line?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Social Supports and Well-Being.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. WALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the Member opposite for the question.

Speaker, our Premier and our government are certainly focused on making lives of the people of our province more affordable, for families and seniors who are struggling. In the spirit of that, we will be launching, in very short order, the poverty reduction and prevention strategy.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. WALL: I'm very proud of the work that's being done on that strategy from the team in my department and I salute all of them. In 2006, we had the best one in the province. That was thrown aside but, right now, we're going to bring back that poverty and prevention plan and, Mr. Speaker, that will certainly help the people of our province moving forward with affordability.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Leader of the Third Party.

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

I hope the poverty reduction plan also has in it guaranteed basic income.

Speaker, the same media story also reports housing shelters at capacity; people being turned away because there are no beds; and the tripling of homelessness rates in the last three years in this city. Now the government has promised 10,000 homes over the next five years.

I ask the minister: Will he present the details of his housing plan to provide affordable, supportive housing starting this year, and where and when will they be built?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Social Supports and Well-Being.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. WALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We heard the concerns during the election while knocking on doors, and we are listening. The plan that we have for 10,000 new homes, over the next five years, is a robust plan but I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, we're working with all stakeholders, community groups, businesses, municipalities to achieve those 10,000 homes. We've had announcements and builds have already been under way since we formed government. We continue to do that work for the people of the province.

There are many plans coming forward through all areas of the province for homes, Mr. Speaker, not just here on the Avalon. We have a great plan. I'm very excited. It's going to be wonderful for the people of the province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi.

S. O'LEARY: Speaker, rate mitigation is set to expire in 2030, a year before the first oil is projected at Bay du Nord. Nearly \$600 million was committed in the first nine months of 2025 alone to offset the skyrocketing cost of power due to Muskrat Falls.

The Bay du Nord project is expected to bring in \$6.4 billion over 25 years, roughly \$250 million a year. So I ask the Premier: What is the government's plan for 2030, and will he admit that the projected revenue from this project will not even cover the cost of rate mitigation?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: Thank you, Speaker.

We are pleased with the Bay du Nord project, and we are pleased with the projected revenue in the first phase of Bay du Nord: \$6.4 billion.

Tiff Macklem, which I had said before, talked about we have a productivity crisis. We've taken measures here, through the department of the Premier, and Mines and Energy, that we're going to grow our economy. In growing the economy, we increase our revenues to be able to input and reduce affordability going forward.

We want to increase and enhance our economy.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi for a quick question.

S. O'LEARY: Speaker, home heating is already hitting people's pockets and this war will only drive the cost of heating a home even higher.

In 2024, the NDP called for the HST to be removed from all forms of home heating, but both government and the Opposition voted against it. If the Liberals had the political will, people would have already had that relief.

Seeing as the current government is still against the policy, I ask the minister: What specific policy aimed directly at home heating costs will this government bring forward to give people relief?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board for a very quick reply.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: Mr. Speaker, we've talked a lot about affordability in the House of Assembly. We've done that from last week on.

When we look at measures of affordability, we talk about increasing the Seniors' Benefit, which was one of our platform promises. We're looking at increasing the basic personal exemption that will put money into the pockets of 285,000 tax filers in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

We want to make life more affordable for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, and I think – judging and reading from our platform – the Members opposite should be able to see that we will make life more affordable for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The time for Question Period has now expired.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees.

Tabling of Documents.

Notices of Motion.

Notices of Motion

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Fogo Island - Cape Freels.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. MCKENNA: Thank you, Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Member for Labrador West, that the following motion will be the private Member's motion to debate in this House on Wednesday afternoon:

WHEREAS all Members of this hon. House respect and give gratitude for the senior citizens of Newfoundland and Labrador in recognition of their lifelong contributions to our province and our communities; and

WHEREAS too many seniors in our province are living below the poverty line, as our province's Seniors' Advocate has consistently demonstrated in reports to this House urging meaningful action; and

WHEREAS too many seniors in our province go without the care and support they require because of the barriers that include cost and accessibility;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the hon. House support the government in affirming its obligation and determination to improve the life of senior citizens across the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador to arrange meaningful initiatives that include, but are not limited to, the following three: enabling more seniors to age comfortably at home with the care and support they require; working with the Seniors' Advocate on strategies and meaningful actions that will help make life more affordable for seniors; and acting decisively on

government's commitment to raise the Seniors' Benefit and continue to index it to inflation.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This will be the PMR on March 11.

SPEAKER: Are there any further notices of motion?

Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given.

Petitions.

Petitions

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Thank you, Speaker.

The reason for this petition is as follows:

While the minimum wage continues to rise, families across Newfoundland and Labrador who manage home care for their aging sons and daughters with disabilities are still being forced to subsidize wages. The hourly rate paid through NL Health Services is not competitive, leaving families to sometimes make up the difference out of pocket.

To add insult to injury, families who already manage the employment of home care workers must also compete with private agencies funded at a higher hourly rate through NL Health Services. When asked why family hired employees are paid less, families are told agencies have additional administrative costs; yet, families also cover advertising, recruitment, scheduling, payroll oversight and are on call when staff call in

sick, responsibilities that are neither acknowledged nor compensated.

If every family in this province chose today to place their loved one into agency-funded care, the cost to government would rise dramatically. Families are not asking for special treatment, they are asking for fairness. Their employees should be compensated at the same rate as the agency employees, especially when many agency employees also provide home care for families.

Therefore, we petition the hon. House of Assembly as follows: We, the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to address this inequity by raising the rate of pay for self-managed home care workers to be on par with those of their agency-based counterparts and commit to maintaining this wage parity into the future.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Further petitions?

The hon. the Member for Conception Bay East - Bell Island.

F. HUTTON: Thank you, Speaker.

I rise today to discuss the Bell Island Ferry service. These are the reasons and background for this petition:

WHEREAS the ferry service from Bell Island to Portugal Cove is a vital and essential daily transportation link connecting the Island to Portugal Cove; and

WHEREAS daily commuter, passenger and commercial traffic constitute the highest volume of traffic of all ferry systems throughout this province, including Marine Atlantic; and

WHEREAS residents continue, especially in winter months, to have travel disruptions due to weather and equipment malfunction from the aging provincial ferry fleet; and

WHEREAS these disruptions cause hardship for residents of Bell Island, as they are often unable to go to work or attend medical or social appointments, and it disrupts the daily delivery of essential goods;

THEREFORE we petition this hon. House of Assembly as follows: We, the undersigned, call on the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to replace the *MV Legionnaire* with the *MV Veteran* when the *Legionnaire* is taken out of service for maintenance later this month.

Mr. Speaker, there are many people in this House of Assembly who represent residents who live on islands; in fact, all of us who live on the Island of Newfoundland do, but we have a situation with Bell Island where it is different. Hundreds of people on a daily basis have to get back and forth to work, but they also have to get to medical appointments. It's been extremely difficult. Close to 750,000 people use that ferry as passengers on a yearly basis, and about 400,000 vehicles. As I mentioned in my petition, it's more than the Marine Atlantic ferry system, all of those.

We know that there is a petition out – an RFP, pardon me, to lease a ferry. We're looking forward to hearing some final results on that. There was also a commitment by this government during the campaign to buy three new ferries. They were going to do the fiscal analysis later. That's a story for another day, but we're waiting to hear back.

I would petition this government to please replace the *Legionnaire*, when it comes out of service, with the *Veteran*, a similar sized ferry, so that people can get back and forth, not only to their jobs each and every day, but, as I mentioned, their medical appointments. It's vital to them.

For me to get to work, I just get in my car and drive here to the Confederation Building. For people who live on Bell Island, that is a vital and essential service that they require on a daily basis.

Thank you, Speaker.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure for reply.

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker.

A couple of things the Member opposite pointed out. We have got RFPs out for a swing vessel due in the end of March. Hopefully they'll be successful. We'll find out later this month, but I have no idea. I know there has been a lot of interest shown, so we're hopeful for that.

We're planning on developing an industry, as committed by the Premier and our party during the election, of ferry replacement. We're planning on building three ferries, or hopefully maybe even more, but we're not afraid to take a chance and try to build an industry here to help Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: As for you –

SPEAKER: The hon. the Leader of the Third – oh, sorry. I thought you were finished.

B. PETTEN: If I may.

SPEAKER: Sorry about that.

B. PETTEN: As for answering the Member opposite's question; he's worried about replacing ferries, I will assure you you'll have enough room on the ferry that I'm going to put on the Bell Island crossing.

But you have to understand, I say to the Member opposite, there are more communities in Newfoundland affected by

ferries than Bell Island. We have a lot of others with a similar situation. Fogo Island comes to mind. I will make a decision that will not hurt the people of Bell Island, nor will it hurt the people on Fogo.

I guarantee it'll have the same size, if not bigger, vessel on Bell Island crossing when the change is made.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Leader of the Third Party.

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, this is a petition for rental increase limitations. These are the reasons for the petition:

A lack of supply of rental units, coupled with increased demand has resulted in profiteering by some landlord simply because the market allows.

The *Residential Tenancies Act, 2018*, allows for annual rent increases of an any amount for any reason. In doing so, the current legislation lends itself to predatory rental increases for the purpose of profit and treats housing as commodity rather than a fundamental human right.

Significant rental increases are making life unaffordable for many in our communities, especially seniors and those on income support. The private sector has failed to deliver on the promise of affordable homes.

Therefore, we, the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to introduce legislation to limit the amount that rent can be increased annually.

Actually, bring in some form of rent and vacancy control, Speaker, that does not allow predatory practices to carry on.

This, by itself, will not solve the housing crisis. This is not necessarily going to build houses or anything else, but it comes down to keeping people from being rendered homeless. That's what this is about.

Seniors, who are looking at the annual increase, especially by – I'm thinking of the landlord – the REITs, the Real Estate Income Trust, that annually increase rents to the point where they squeeze people out of there. They have nowhere to go. They're on a fixed income. Whether it's income support, pension, you name it, the fact is, they're getting down to the point where it becomes a choice: do I stay housed; do I end up on the street?

I had a call this weekend from a friend with a 90-year-old who was rendered homeless and on the street – 90 years old. It shouldn't be.

We've had examples where rents have gone up well beyond what the cost of living is – what would be reasonable. I can still think of one landlord who, in writing to me, he said he increased his rent from \$1,100 on one of his houses up to \$2,500 a month because, to put it in his words, there were so many people chasing after it. That's nothing to do with cost; that's everything to do with just taking advantage of the market.

So, in addition, let's think about other solutions: land-leased communities, land trusts, rent banks, tenant unions, co-operative housing, non-market. At least here, while we're getting these 10,000 homes built that are promised, maybe we can keep people from being rendered homeless and out in the street or into a shelter.

It's not just St. John's. People from Central are coming in here for the same reason.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Burgeo - La Poile.

M. KING: Thank you, Speaker.

These are the reasons for and background of this petition:

Access to justice is a fundamental right of all Canadians. The closure of the provincial court in Port aux Basques has created a significant barrier to justice for residents of the Southwest Coast of Newfoundland and Labrador. Community members involved in civil and criminal matters are now required to travel long distances to attend proceedings, creating hardship for individuals, families, witnesses and legal professionals.

The courthouse also served as a local point of access for a range of justice-related and government-supported services, including matters involving family law, fines administration, peace bonds, legal aid interactions and other processes that rely on in-person attendance. Its closure has reduced the availability of these services in the region, resulting in delays, increased costs and disproportionate impacts on vulnerable residents.

Therefore, we petition the hon. House of Assembly as follows: We, the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to re-open the provincial court in Port aux Basques to restore accessible, timely and locally delivered justice services for residents of the Southwest Coast of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Mr. Speaker, I would note, on this petition here, I have many signatures, different signatures from different communities in the Port aux Basques region. I know here are some Port aux Basques, Burnt Islands, Margaree and even as far as St. Andrew's, Mr. Speaker, on this petition.

As I mentioned, earlier in the prayer part of the petition, it's not only just accessing the justice part. This building in Port aux Basques is a service to many different

coastal communities that access different government services, and the fear is that those services are going to be taken away.

I know it's easy for a lot of my colleagues here in this House to hop in their car and jump down the road and get to a building in 10 minutes, but that's not the case in my area. A lot of people accessing justice have to travel long distances that are out of their own pocket, at their own cost, so this is definitely a concern for my area and something that I'll continue to present as they present the petition to me.

I had an opportunity to ask the minister a question last week on this, and I certainly look forward to the report from the members. I know it's taken an extensive amount of time. No update, looking for any information at all possible. I noted that she said timely access is important for this government. Well, I would say to the minister and to the government that you can't have timely access to justice if the doors are closed.

So I urge the government to continue the work that they need to do from the working group, and I appreciate the work that they do. I know they are certainly valuable members of the justice community, but I'm really looking forward to that report and seeing what this government will do on this matter.

Thank you, Speaker.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Justice and Public Safety for a response.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Thank you.

Speaker, first of all, I'd like to thank the Member opposite for his petition. I can, first of all, say that, yes indeed, timely access to justice is a priority for our government. We are committed to ensuring that people of Newfoundland and Labrador have a criminal

justice system and a court that is accessible. I can note that with respect to the working group that has been established, that was done immediately upon our department and our government hearing about the court closures. That was very important to us and it was acted upon immediately.

With respect to any delays that may have occurred with respect to the working group, those can be attributed, Speaker, to weather at the time and scheduling difficulties; but I can advise that the group comprised of many representatives throughout the entire criminal justice system, which includes the judiciary, Crown prosecutors, lawyers, Legal Aid and private lawyers, labour as well, all have been working very hard over the last number of weeks to identify the root causes of these issues and I can also say they have been making progress. They've been very successful given the short period of time that they have had to work on this.

So I'm very pleased with the work to date. I thank them for their volunteer commitment to ensuring that these important issues are addressed and I look forward as well to hearing the presentation that I'm advised will be coming very soon. We will have things then to address these problems that exist.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Speaker.

Orders of the Day.

SPEAKER: Orders of the Day.

Orders of the Day

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Speaker, Motion 2, introduction and first reading of Bill 9.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board for leave to introduce a bill entitled, An Act to Amend the Future Fund Act, Bill 9, and I further move that this said bill now be read for a first time.

SPEAKER: It's been moved and seconded that the said bill, An Act to Amend the Future Fund Act, Bill 9, be read a first time.

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

Motion, the hon. the Minister Finance and President of Treasury Board to introduce a bill, "An Act to Amend the Future Fund Act," carried. (Bill 9)

CLERK (Hawley George): A bill, An Act to Amend the Future Fund Act. (Bill 9)

SPEAKER: This bill has now been read a first time.

When shall the bill be read a second time?

L. PARROTT: Tomorrow.

SPEAKER: Tomorrow.

On motion, Bill 9 read a first time, ordered read a second time on tomorrow.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, Motion 3, introduction and first reading of Bill 10.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Minister of Government Services and Labour, for leave to introduce a bill entitled, An Act to Amend the Workplace Health, Safety and Compensation Act, 2022, Bill 10, and I further move that the said bill now be read for a first time.

SPEAKER: It has been moved and seconded that the said bill, An Act to Amend the Workplace Health, Safety and Compensation Act, 2022, Bill 10 be read a first time.

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

Motion, the hon. the Minister Responsible for WorkplaceNL to introduce a bill, "An Act to Amend the Workplace Health, Safety and Compensation Act, 2022," carried. (Bill 10)

CLERK: A bill, An Act to Amend the Workplace Health, Safety and Compensation Act, 2022. (Bill 10)

SPEAKER: The bill has been read a first time.

When shall the bill be read a second time?

L. PARROTT: Tomorrow.

SPEAKER: Tomorrow.

On motion, Bill 10 read a first time, ordered read a second time on tomorrow.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board, that under the authority of Standing Order 65, that the Member for Terra Nova, the Member for Cape St. Francis, the Member for Carbonear - Trinity - Bay de Verde, the Member for Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair and the Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi shall comprise a Committee and in accordance with the Standing Order shall report within the first 20 sitting days of appointment a list of Members to compose the Standing Committees for the House referred to in Standing Order 65(1).

Mr. Speaker, this is general housekeeping, and it's a part of what happens at the beginning of every new session. It allows us to create all the Committees that come under the subheadings when we're heading into the budget. We'll do that over the next couple of days, so all the Members are aware of who they are on the Striking Committee, and again, this is general housekeeping that's just a part of what we do from day to day.

SPEAKER: Any further speakers to the motion?

The hon. the Member for Virginia Waters - Pleasantville.

B. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We're just fully aware that this is a housekeeping item. We're going to support this fully and move this forward to the next level.

SPEAKER: All those in favour of the motion?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: Against?'

Motion is carried.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

C. PARDY: Thank you, Speaker.

I give notice that I will on tomorrow move that the House resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole on Supply to consider a certain resolution for the granting of Interim Supply to His Majesty, Bill 3.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

C. PARDY: Speaker, I wish to inform that House that I have received a message from Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor.

SPEAKER: All rise.

I wish to inform the House that I've received a message from Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor.

"As Lieutenant Governor of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, I transmit a request to appropriate sums required for the Public Service of the Province for the year ending 31 March 2027, by way of Interim Supply, and in accordance with the provisions of sections 54 and 90 of the *Constitution Act, 1867*, I recommend this request to the House of Assembly."

Sgd.: _____

Her Honour Joan Marie Aylward, ONL,
Lieutenant Governor

You may be seated.

The hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

C. PARDY: Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture, that the message, together with a related bill, be referred to a Committee of the Whole on Supply.

SPEAKER: The motion is that the message, together with the related bill be, referred to a Committee of the Whole on Supply, and that I do now leave the Chair.

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, that the House resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole, the Speaker left the Chair.

Committee of the Whole

CHAIR (Dwyer): Order, please!

We are considering the resolution and related Bill 3, An Act Granting to His Majesty Certain Sums of Money for Defraying Certain Expenses of the Public Service for the Financial Year Ending March 31, 2027 and for Other Purposes Relating to the Public Service.

Resolution

"Be it resolved by the House of Assembly in Legislative Session convened, as follows:

“That it is expedient to introduce a measure to provide for the granting to His Majesty for defraying certain expenses of the public service for the financial year ending March 31, 2027 the sum of \$3,985,930,500.”

CHAIR: Shall the resolution carry?

The hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

C. PARDY: Thank you, Chair.

This is an annual item that occurs in every budget that has occurred since the beginning of time at Interim Supply. We've gone through it many times.

I can understand if those that are new to the House of Assembly may not know exactly what it does, and I'm sure there are many viewers that are watching today from home may not know exactly what the Interim Supply is all about.

For example, sitting in his chesterfield, watching the proceedings here this afternoon, is a retired harvester, a senior from Elliston, Mr. Scott Martin. I'll take the opportunity to explain this to Scott, as I do with all other viewers, about the purpose and the rationale behind the Interim Supply.

The Clerk read out the amount, a really large figure, \$3,985,930,500, and what the interim bill does, it allows the House of Assembly and the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to meet the financial obligations for three months, from April 1, 2026, until June 30, 2026 – three months. Some would say that's a lot of money to do the business of the House within a three-month period, and it is a large amount. It accounts for 33 per cent of our budget – 33 per cent – and that will make sure that the government operates.

Three of the largest expenditures that we'll be aware of would be health care, transportation and infrastructure and education. Payrolls, income support, contracts that would be levied and issued in the first quarter of a new budget would be necessary, and this in no way impacts main

supply which is the budget that we will debate in the coming weeks within this House of Assembly. It is just a measure, an interim measure, to make sure that the government continues to function.

How long the budget is debated for is anybody's guess. The range of days of which the budget could be debated, there was a low in 2023 of 23 days; in 2019, it was 71 days. So you can understand that that three-month period that we've got makes sure that we've got the budget debate concluded before we go into and pass and vote on the main supply. Every aspect of government is addressed in the Interim Supply.

In 2025 budget, of which the Opposition were in government at that time, we had a \$10.7 billion revenue and we had expenditures of \$11 billion. Thus, if you did the math on that, you would realize that you had a deficit of a little over \$300 million.

That deficit grew. In the summer, it reached over \$600 million and, after the election when we took government, that deficit was at \$948 million. That is a large deficit, but one thing that we have going for us in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador is that we have a lot of natural resources that we could produce, that we can draw from. Keep in mind if you increase your input, your revenue, you're able to meet the needs of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians in various programs who face affordability issues.

It is the revenue that allows us to make the expenditures. We can spend a lot of time asking about doing more but when we know what we've got in the deficit, what we're carrying, \$348 million deficit, everyone will realize that to service that deficit it takes a lot of money. There's a lot of money to service that deficit.

A question occurred from the hon. Member on the Bay du Nord. We are very hopeful with Bay du Nord that it will not only provide \$6.4 billion, but we think that there are industries that are going to spin off from Bay du Nord that we can benefit from. We think

there'll be an industry created at the Bull Arm site with the floating dry dock. We think that will be an industry that will keep on giving to the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

The Minister of Energy and Mines would be optimistic with liquid natural gas in our near future. There were statements that were made that other proponents were only interested in the liquid natural gas only until Bay du Nord came on board and made their announcement. So when I reference in Question Period the Bank of Canada Governor Tiff Macklem saying that we've got a productivity crisis, that is what the country is trying to do. We are trying to grow our economy in order to provide for the residents of Newfoundland and Labrador. While we got a great place to live, we think with increase in revenue, we can really improve upon that place to live. So long-term economic growth is a priority.

It's often through legislation that you'll get an idea as to what government is all about. Many in the Opposition were so drawn to our platform that they asked many questions about it, and that is flattering and is good because there are a lot of things in that platform that benefits Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. In fact, we like it a lot here. I can tell by the questions and the comments and reflections on it that the Opposition does as well. They are good items that serve the residents of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Our legislation that we brought in thus far, I say Bill 5, where we look at making permanent the gas tax reduction – making it permanent – in 22 days in Newfoundland and Labrador, as a result of our taxation, the price of gasoline was due to increase 8.05 cents. Moving from currently 7.5 cents a litre, which is the cheapest in Canada. In 22 days, it was due to go up to 14.5 cents a litre. Some would say, all would say, Scott Martin would say in Elliston, that is a good affordability measure.

Gasoline, we are maintaining it at 7.5 cents. It is not, at the end of this month, going to 14.5 cents. We would hope to have support

when that bill is voted on by the Opposition. Some would say, how about diesel? Well, diesel is the second lowest in Canada and it's currently at 9.5 cents. At the end of this month, the taxation on diesel is supposed to go up to 16.5 cents a litre, and it goes up. It is not happening, because I would think that this House, through collaboration, will be voting to make that permanent, and we would keep the price of gas to be amongst the lowest or the lowest in the country on gasoline, and the provincial tax the second lowest, only behind Ontario by half a cent in diesel.

We know the spike in oil that has occurred now, we know that a lot of our shipment of foods and we know the importance of oil and gas for our economy.

We've talked about affordability a lot here and referenced the platform, and the Interim Supply references it when we look at the measures we're about to pass in the House of Assembly. We know that the people of Newfoundland and Labrador are feeling the brunt of a lot of pressures that would be out there. That's why in our platform, we talked about raising the Seniors' Benefit by 20 per cent.

We know that in Opposition, I think my colleagues who were here with me would know that – me, personally, probably no less than half a dozen times, talked about indexing the Seniors' Benefit. It was indexed. It was increased. But we were standing and we are standing by an additional 20 per cent increase for the seniors of whom we value so much, all of us in the House of Assembly, that would be out there to benefit from that.

We're also looking at raising the basic personal exemption. The basic personal exemption is going to put a lot of tax money back into the pockets of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. How many? Every one of them – every one of them.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: Because when we raise the basic personal exemption from \$13,000 to

\$15,000 that you don't have to pay taxes, all 285,000 tax filers win money back in their pockets in order to spend.

Then there are other ones which I think that when it comes up, we're talking about adding 3,000 more children to the Newfoundland and Labrador Child Benefit. We talked about it. We talked lots about it last year. We requested it. Wait until you see what that benefits the children in Newfoundland and Labrador.

The hon. Member, through Question Period, talked about the demand on food banks. We know that last year it was reported that 4,700 individuals below the age of 18 visit food banks. That is a lot of youth visiting food banks.

One of the first actions when we came in is that we wanted to put the American liquor back on the shelves and move it out of our warehousing. When we did that, we said that we would donate \$1 million from the sales to the food banks in Newfoundland and Labrador, the community food-sharing network – \$1 million. At that announcement we made, we signed and passed a cheque over in advance for \$500,000. We did.

We know that fueling food banks is not the answer. But it is a mitigating factor until we do find out and we get our poverty reduction plan on the go with measures that are going to help those that would be in most need.

Fred Marshall at that reception, he got behind the podium with the media and he stated for every \$10 donated to the Community Food Sharing Association, they can turn that into \$205 of product. That's what he said. So I would say, when you look at what \$500,000 for a food bank, the 60 food banks they serve, then that's quite significant.

CHAIR: The hon. minister's time has expired.

C. PARDY: Thank you, Chair.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Mount Scio.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Chair.

Happy to speak today to Interim Supply. As the minister mentioned, this is kind of a routine thing. I do have some questions in Committee, going through the schedule of expenditures, and clause 3(5) is a new clause. So interesting – I'm going to look forward to asking about that; I guess more information about where that comes from. But I do want to talk about the financial situation of the province, Chair.

So we know in August 18, 2025, we did have a financial update, and up until then and in last year's budget, oil was \$73 a barrel. Then it was updated in August to \$66 US a barrel. Now oil today has gone significantly higher than that, so that is excellent for the Newfoundland and Labrador Treasury, but it's bad for people that may fill up at the gas pumps.

The minister talked a lot about the price of gas. I was going to save that for the gas price bill, but we can see how we go in my 14 minutes.

We knew that the deficit originally in the budget last year was \$372 million, and then the update from August, it was updated to \$626 million. Then in December when the minister had his financial update, unfortunately then it was \$948 million. So that's quite a large deficit, Chair.

But we also know that the Conservative government knew about the deficit before they issued their Blue Book. So they do have a lot of promises in the Blue Book and they've also said that they won't have mandate letters, that the Blue Book will be their mandate letters. We've also heard the government say that they won't do it all this year, and that's fair, but it is their plan throughout their term and that is fair as well, Chair.

We know the minister talked about raising the personal income tax threshold to \$15,000. So my math says that that works

out to \$342 a year for, kind of, the maximum refund that someone will get for that. It's certainly beneficial for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, but \$342 per tax filer is the maximum amount that that will peak out at, Chair.

I believe I heard the Premier say in Question Period this morning that, in this budget, we will also see coverage for people who travel for medical transportation. I believe the Premier said that in Question Period this morning. I could be mistaken. But that was also in the Blue Book, which is now the government's policy mandate.

So we did hear a lot of other promises in the Blue Book which had cost estimates associated with them. I do note that there was \$4.6 million in the Blue Book for covering medical travel. I'm surprised if you could cover all the travel for everyone who needs to travel for medical purposes for \$4.6 million, but we will see what the government puts in the budget for that.

We have heard from residents. We know that the government promised pension plans for early childhood educators, which is a very noble cause. We know that early childhood educators work very hard, Chair, and they estimated at the time that that would cost about \$5 million. I think you'll need a lot more than \$5 million to cover pension plans for early childhood educators, but we will see when the budget comes out, maybe this year, maybe that will come next year. I'm sure they're eagerly waiting to find out information about their pension plans.

The government promised to expand the Physical Activity Tax Credit. They budgeted \$2.2 million for that. We don't know if that will be in this year's budget or not. We haven't seen a bill to make that change yet, but we can wait and see.

The government announced that they were going to, in their Blue Book, have a Graduate Tuition Refund Program costing \$16.2 million, Chair. So we're very interested to find that out. I'm sure the students and graduates are also eager to

find out if that would apply to them. It probably won't apply to me; I've been graduated a long time now, Chair, but everyone I'm sure is eagerly waiting to find out how that \$16.2 million or whatever the number will be used by the government to reimburse people's tuition.

The government announced that there were going to increase cell coverage, and they've budgeted \$3 million for that. Now, Chair, I was not directly responsible for that, but I am very familiar with the different ways that can be leveraged by cell companies and satellite companies to improve cell coverage. They estimated that would cost \$3 million.

Now, on one hand, thankfully I think cellphone technology is improving significantly, whereby cellphones can now use satellite to communicate in areas where previously you'd need a cell tower, so they could squeeze something in there for under \$3 million; but if they are making infrastructure investments across rural Newfoundland to improve cell coverage, \$3 million is not going to go very far.

We've seen historically that the government puts out RFPs and then the big telecommunications companies bid on them and they don't do the work and they don't pay for them – the government doesn't pay for it, but the work doesn't happen and cell coverage does not improve. So I hope the government can put the \$3 million to use to increase cell coverage for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

The government also promised a Rotational Worker Tax Credit, and they budgeted \$4.8 million for that, Chair. We'll be interested to see if the government will enable that for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians this tax year. I find that a bit conflicting just because we do want people to work here; we don't want people to go away and work, but we understand that it's challenging if someone goes away to work and the government did promise in their Blue Book a Rotational Worker Tax Credit.

I just also want to pull out that they promised four new MRI machines, at \$4.4 million, Chair. I know MRI machines have a wait time; you order them and they don't arrive – you can't just order them with delivery overnight, and there's a whole team that has to work on them. And there's the radioisotopes, I believe they're referred to, which you have to either make or procure. You can't just order them.

Then the staff, the technologists who operate those machines and who interpret the reports and the radiologists who interpret those reports, that is not an insignificant endeavour, and I do wish the government in spending \$4.4 million to put in and operationalize four new MRI machines, but we will see if they make that investment in this budget year, or in a future budget year, Chair.

The minister talked a lot about revenue, and obviously, yes, we want more revenue for the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador. With oil prices going up, they will see more revenue. I have some quick math done on that, but the oil prices I believe went up \$10 in the last few days, \$10 a barrel. So that's excellent for the Treasury, and the government is probably either now reducing the deficit a little bit or squeezing in a few more programs within their budget allocation as they finalize those numbers leading up to the next few weeks, whenever the budget it out, Chair.

The Bay du Nord is certainly a good announcement; I know we've heard from the community that everyone is very happy with that and we look forward to the extra revenues and the new industries that that will create. There are a lot of questions about the dry dock and who's going to own it, who's going to operate it, what projects are they going to work on. So I was speaking with an industry expert recently, and obviously what they build, what the government decides to build, who builds it, will all depend on what it does. It's not one-size-fits-all for dry docks, I've been learning, Chair.

That's going to be an interesting challenge for the government. Is that budgeted this year? We know \$200 million is going to come from Equinor; we don't know when that's coming; we don't know how much extra this government is going to put forward to that. Now, I think it's also an excellent question. Equinor just made hundreds of extra millions of dollars, with the price of oil going up. If we look at the Newfoundland Treasury, can Equinor be squeezed to put more than \$200 million into that?

We know that these big oil and gas projects also have a lot of philanthropic donations that come with them. Sometimes those are preassigned and sometimes they're not. We know for example Hibernia and Hebron, those come with millions and tens of millions of dollars worth of philanthropic endeavours. So we will see with Equinor – we'd love to see the benefits agreement; I think the people of Newfoundland and Labrador would love to see that. We don't know if this \$200 million is it; we're still looking for more information on that, Chair.

So I think the dry dock, a lot of key questions around that. Who is going to own it? Is Transportation and Infrastructure going to operate a dry dock? Who's going to work there? What are they going to work on? What are they building the dry dock for? Industry experts have told me you need to know what you're building for. You can't just build a dry dock and hope they'll come. Do you build a big one? Do you build a small one? So that's really interesting, and we're going to wait to learn more about that from the government.

But that will bring in revenue, which is excellent for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. The other big elephant in the room, I'd say, in terms of revenue, is Churchill Falls. I do hope, and I plead and I really hope that the government is progressing with negotiations. We haven't heard any update recently, so I hope and I wish that the independent committee that they put together is coming back and will support moving forward aggressively in negotiations with Quebec.

Again, I've said this before in this House. The Minister of Finance would now be seeing an extra billion dollars coming in if that MOU was signed. They'd be getting \$500 million for this year and \$500 million for last year, working up to \$17 million between last year and 2041. So it's a lot of extra revenue that the government can use to build schools and pay nurses and pay public sector workers and everything that they want to do in the Blue Book and way more.

So I really wish that they – you know, their grandchildren, my grandchildren, the grandchildren of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians need that revenue. If they can get a better deal, great. But no deal, I can't even fathom. So, Chair, I wish the government all the best in bringing in the most revenue they can, whether or not from the current deal or a future deal, Chair.

As the minister spoke a lot about the gas prices, I will do that for a few minutes as well. I know we'll get to that as well when we get to the gas price change. Our party, the Opposition, will support the reduction of gas tax – the removal of the sunset clause, Chair, for the gas tax bill. I do think it's a bit sensational for the government to say, oh, the price will go up on this date. We've kept the price as is, consistent. The sunset clause was there previously because of the federal backstop. Our government, there was always the intention that this would continue. But fair enough, the government is making it permanent and we will certainly support that, Chair.

I think those are my main comments and I'm looking forward to asking some questions of the minister in Committee.

Thank you.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Humber - Bay of Islands.

E. JOYCE: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I know this is Interim Supply and we can speak on any issues, so I'm going to speak on a few issues that are affecting the people

out in Corner Brook that I'm going to be looking for in the budget itself. It's not just the budgetary process, but it is the ministers involved with it.

Before I get into that, Mr. Chair, just on a few little notes that I've got here and, of course, I'm just an independent here who sometimes speaks their mind for the people that has elected them. I just wanted to bring this up.

Since the election was called and since the government was sworn in – I've just made a few little notes here – I met with the Minister of Justice. I met with the Minister of Government Services. The Minister of Health helped me with the furnace for Sacred Heart School, when that was gone. I met with the Minister of Health. I met with the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands today. I met with the Minister of Social Supports and Well-Being.

I met with the Minister of Jobs and Growth; Rural Development; and Immigration. I met with the Minister of Energy and Mines. I spoke to the Premier on numerous occasions. I spoke to the Minister of Tourism on several issues. I met with the Minister of Municipal Affairs. I met with the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure.

I haven't met with the Minister of Fisheries, because there was no need yet. I have spoken on many occasions with the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board and the Member for Bonavista. What a refreshing feeling, that you can call in –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

E. JOYCE: What a refreshing feeling.

As I said to each one of the ministers, you'll never get what you always ask for because you're doing the budget on what all ask for, for each department, but as long as each resident and each community is given a fair shake, a fair deal, and each time you present the information that you did on behalf of your constituents, you are listened to, that's all you can ask for.

You can't get everything that can ask for; you just can't do it, and I understand that. But it's my role as the MHA to bring these things forward to the ministers who are making the decisions. I just want to recognize that, that I had more meetings in the last three months that I did in three years prior.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

E. JOYCE: I just want to recognize that.

A lot of the Members who are here, weren't here at the time, so this is no reflection on the current Members. Some, but the vast majority not. I know the Member for Grand Bank, we always had a great relationship. Any time I wanted to have a chat or conversation, his door was open, and I'll recognize that.

So this is no reflection on the new ministers, but it's just refreshing that I don't have to always try to keep arguing, just to get your point across, just to hand the information. So I just wanted to say I look forward to the continued support and I can assure you that any discussions that we had in working with the issues will remain within the office that we had that discussion. Because sometimes, they get pretty frank and they get pretty tense and you can rest assured that our discussions were wholesome and they were well taken.

Again, I want to recognize each person, each minister and a few of the boys in the back, too, also said we've got to work on a few things together. I know the Member for Humber - St. George's said the same thing, that we've got to work together on issues for the area, not just each other's district. I just want to recognize that.

I'm going to go on, Mr. Chair, about some of the issues that I'm hearing out in Corner Brook. Health care is number one by far. Health care is a major issue across the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, and is a major issue in Corner Brook. I know the Minister of Health and Community Services said that now they're going to move forward with allowing nurse

practitioners to bill MCP. I've pushed for that for two to three years. Two to three years, that was my number one goal. Just that alone will take up about 9,000 or 10,000 people who don't have a family doctor in the Corner Brook western region. Just that alone.

I was astonished when I pushed with the Liberals to try to get it done and, at the end of it, before the election, they were going to look at a pilot project. But here this government committed to do it. The Premier stood up in his chair, as Opposition, and said he will allow it to happen, and the minister stated the other day and, on NTV News also, that they will allow nurse practitioners to bill MCP. That will help out so many people who haven't got family doctors, and many seniors who have follow-ups, might be monthly, might be bi-weekly on some occasions, that they couldn't afford the \$50 or \$60 to pay for it. That is a big relief. I'll be speaking to the minister on that also.

Another big issue out in Corner Brook is the lack of acute-care beds. I'm going back and I could take – no, not really, because I wasn't there. Part of the plan with the new hospital was to build new long-term care beds. There are 162 acute-care beds, I think, in the hospital now. The goal was to find some way to build bungalows or extensions somehow to put long-term care patients – at the time, there were about 63 or 64 long-term care patients in acute-care beds. Once that hospital opened, they moved over in acute care.

So what happened is that we, as the government, all of us collectively, thought there was going to be room for acute-care patients. There is not – there is not. The commitment was made – same with the PET scanner, that was taken out; same with this part about acute-care beds, needed the rooms for the long-term care patients, that was moved aside somehow. There are a few other things, but that's fine.

So there were 45 beds built over in the old Western Memorial Regional Hospital. There were 20, I think, for acute-care patients to

move over, brought it down to about 45. There were some then, if the patients had some surgeries, they would give them wait time over in that unit. There's also, right now, if you're at a home and you need long-term care beds, some of the beds were used for that. So 45 beds were not used for the acute-care patients in the new Western Memorial Regional Hospital. They weren't used.

I'm going to be asking questions on Wednesday on this. I want to give the minister fair due, which I always do. I'm not here to embarrass anybody; I'm here to get answers and get help. I will be asking the minister, will she, or the government, provide funding to put another 45 beds – because there are still two floors there – in the old Western Memorial Regional Hospital to take care of the acute-care beds and move the long-term care patients back into the old Western, with services provided, as needed, for long-term care patients?

If the minister commits to that – and the Minister of Finance is going to be a big part of that also – if you can commit to that, that would free up 45 acute-care beds that are long-term care patients. When people go in to the emergency, the biggest backlog – talk to the doctors – is they can't put them in a bed because there's no bed available.

When you hear stories that were just on TV a little while ago – and I know the people, many of them personally. I know them personally. When you hear that they're in a corridor for four or five days, it's true. When you hear that they have to get someone to help them and bring them to a private washroom, it's true.

This is no reflection on the staff. This is absolutely none; this was a planning issue. This is no reflection. When you look at *M*A*S*H*, when there's one room here, with the curtains on both sides, and there are eight or 10 in that room, that's true. I've been there. I've had family members there. I've seen it.

It will take a couple of months to have it done. But if the government can commit to

refurbishing those two floors, or extend the ones that are there now, and put another 45 long-term care patients and get the care that they really need – because acute-care services are different from long-term care services. We all know that. We all have loved ones or family or friends in that situation.

If we can ever make an announcement and then start the process to refurbish the two floors to bring up 45 beds, that would alleviate so many concerns about patients at the emergency department in the Western Memorial Regional Hospital that now if you have to be admitted, because you have major issues, that you can get a bed.

Thank you, Mr. Chair, for giving me the few extra seconds to bring that up, because that is a serious issue. That is the question I'll be asking on Wednesday to the minister to look at that.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Jobs and Growth; Rural Development; Immigration.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PADDOCK: Thank you, Chair.

Always great to be able to get up in this House, and particularly on an issue like Interim Supply, and lend support to my colleague, the Minister of Finance and also to, I guess in the way, provide some rebuttal to some comments that were made earlier by the Opposition.

We all know, I guess, everyone in this House, Interim Supply is a process. It is about providing certainty to government, and particularly government departments with regard to spending, and particularly where we have significant long-lead items like in the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure.

It was highlighted by the Opposition with regard to the deficit last year – I guess the current fiscal year that closes March 31. At the second update last year when the – well, before that, when the deficit had ballooned to \$672 million, the whole issue then with regard to the size of the deficit and the ballooning amount of it, we knew, on this side, that it was higher. Why we knew it was higher, because of the improper accounting of the tobacco settlement. How much higher, we didn't know, and the Minister of Finance was able to do it a proper accounting of that in November.

This whole issue of the accounting of the tobacco settlement, which we raised repeatedly – repeatedly – over the past year, gave us an opportunity when we formed government to correct the issue and we reversed it, which drove up the deficit.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PADDOCK: Now, I want to highlight the importance of that. That was picked up by the Auditor General. The Auditor General said, in agreeing with our proper accounting then of the tobacco settlement, that she would have given a qualified opinion on the books of this province if that tobacco settlement had stayed the way it was. What would have been the impact of that on our province?

It would have been perilous for our province in looking to raise capital on the capital markets, increasing our bonds and the like. Luckily, we formed government and the Minister of Finance was able to correct that mistake.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PADDOCK: The other thing I want to highlight is with regard to the permanent gas tax that we're about to ensure is executed for all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians by the end of this month. We pleaded last year that it be made permanent. We understood the pressure on every Newfoundlander and Labradorian, and it's about providing certainty in a budgeting process, not just for government,

but also for small gas station owners as they plan multi-year. We're going to give them that opportunity this year.

The other thing I want to highlight is with regard to the increases for seniors. We brought in a PMR last year lobbying for increases for our seniors, those that helped to build this very province. That PMR was defeated by the then Liberal government. We will correct that here and we will provide more funding, tax relief to seniors this coming year.

The other thing I want to highlight now and focus on is on Bay du Nord. I'm truly pleased to hear from the other side that Bay du Nord is a good announcement.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PADDOCK: I finally hope that puts an end to their questioning on it, in their realization that this is a good deal and a good opportunity for all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

One of the issues that was raised with the Bay du Nord and was elaborated on by the Opposition was the dry dock – the floating dry dock and the value of it. I'll give a little metaphor to what Wayne Gretzky used to say: You skate to where the puck is going. That's what this government is doing with a floating dry dock. We're setting up an industry for success for multiple generations.

Let me give you some facts and figures. Currently, as was highlighted, the backlog in work on the marine side in Eastern Canada is upwards of two years. Moreover, we're seeing a growth across the marine industry: fishing, Department of National Defence, that includes now Coast Guard as well, oil and gas – in fact, Bay du Nord alone will require five support vessels, a new sea base operations – and we're also seeing growth in maritime transportation opportunities. The collection of all that represents an unrivaled opportunity for this province to seize the moment, to seize the opportunity and to skate where the puck is going.

The other thing I want to highlight with regard to that floating dry dock – and I know this from experience as a naval logistician – is over the life of a capital asset, you spend the capital cost again in maintenance over a 25-30-year life cycle. With regard to whether or not some of the stuff is built here, we're going to have an opportunity over multiple decades to pick up significant repair and overall work for this province with that floating dry dock. And it's a floating dry dock; it's not a stationary one. We're going to have an opportunity to move that dry dock and place it in areas where there's an opportunity to pick up some work of opportune, for example the MSC Baltic, Lark Harbour. If that floating dry dock was available now, we would have been able to have addressed that climate issue.

I'll also go back to my own life as a former naval officer and highlight that this floating dry dock is not just of benefit to Newfoundland and Labrador, but it will become a strategic enabler for the Government of Canada. When we had the fire on board HMCS Chicoutimi, the submarine, the Government of Canada had to contract a foreign country to bring our submarine home. Now, with an asset like a floating dry dock, we will provide Canada with an opportunity to support any of our seagoing assets for Canada, anywhere in the world.

If it needs to be brought home, the asset to do that will be located here on the Eastern Seaboard in Newfoundland and Labrador. So as you can see, what is being done in this budget, what is being done with this request for Interim Supply is setting this province up for success, not just for this year, but for many years to come.

Thank you so much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Leader of the Third Party.

J. DINN: Thank you, Chair.

I've listened to, certainly, the slogan which is: Better health care, lower taxes, safer communities. I guess there's a certain irony in that whenever we would propose solutions here, usually the comment that was said to us was: That's fine, Jim, great idea, but where you getting the money? Yet, here we're going to improve health care; we're going to make communities safer, but we're going to lower taxes in the process.

I know government has an aspirational plan to get money to skate where the puck is going, and they're hoping that the puck is actually going to go that way. I would also indicate that transitioning to a greener, more sustainable economy is where the puck is going also, but that one seems to be a missed opportunity altogether.

But I'm thinking here – and I was thinking as I was jotting down some points – in terms of Omar Mohammed. Omar Mohammed was the man – he was a child soldier in Darfur, obviously traumatized, came to Newfoundland and Labrador, he struggled with mental illness and poverty, and was having trouble finding housing. Now, he was in my district and I know that, in some cases, he was sleeping in the back of vehicles. He was deeply troubled, but he lost his life. He was killed by police in the Regetta Plaza back in 2023. I'm thinking, in terms of the tragedy involved with that, how does someone come from a different hemisphere altogether, different continent, come to Newfoundland and Labrador, possibly to find hope for a new beginning and he meets his end here.

I say that because I think we failed him and failed others, collectively, because the cost to him personally, cost to his friends was significant and it could have turned out a lot better. It could have turned out more positively.

So we're debating Interim Supply here, and I know that one of the platforms of the slogan is public safety, which when I hear discussion, comes around police – we need more police. Obviously, then we're going to need more courts. We're probably going to need more judges, definitely bigger jails.

Still, when people come out of jails, there's no support.

I'm thinking of a student of mine I met over there in the encampment, when it was set up there. A former student of mine who had a trade, by the way, but said to me – and I remember these words – Jim, if I could find something to hold on to, something that would pull me away from the pull of jail, that would give me that momentum to move forward. He said: Look, I know how to get back in jail. It's a calling almost in terms of it's where he's going to fall back. He was looking for something – housing in this case – that would give him the supports he needed.

He was sleeping over there because he didn't want to be sleeping in the shelters, especially in some of the shelters where they might be low barrier where he would be exposed to the very thing he was trying to get away from. Last I heard, he had moved back to the community where he came from but, still, was still struggling.

I say that because I think of Brother Jim McSheffrey, who I knew personally many years ago. He was with Educators for Peace with me, and he was attempting to establish the MacMorran centre, the community centre down there. He was trying to get money from the government – very difficult to get at that time. The argument he used to use, he figured it cost anywhere from \$110,000 to \$130,000 a year to keep a person housed in prison; whereas that \$130,000 in terms of a community centre and actually keeping people out of jail would be better spent.

I've spoken to people as well – my student is one and with the attorneys and others – that people often leave the jail without support, sometimes on the doorstep – here it is, go. No supports, nowhere to get there, no housing and we expect people then to, I guess, turn their lives around. You can't do it; especially, if your life has been a life where you've dealt with poverty and so on and so forth.

I'll read this – why I'm thinking we need to invest, certainty, in the social determinants of health; spend the money there and we'll save the money somewhere else, big time.

From *The London Free Press* on June 9, 2022, "Core police calls plummet after St. Thomas housing facility opened:" Calls to St. Thomas police for service dropped by 87 per cent each month.

That was when Indwell moved in. So think about that; they moved in, they provided affordable housing, they provide the supports and the need for police dropped. They actually had to reassign their forces and resources elsewhere. Even the chief of police at the time said that addressing root causes such as mental health, addictions and housing insecurity provides a coordinated approach, and not just increasing police resources. I think if we want to make safer communities, if we want to do well, we want to make sure that the people around us are doing well.

We know that – I can tell you this – there are people who are shipped into St. John's, put on buses from other parts of the Island and shipped in, because there are no shelters out in a lot of the areas. They're shipped into St. John's, so a provincial problem becomes a city problem. It's a provincial problem and we need to address it.

I can tell you with regard to the opioid drug use and so on and so forth, I hear it all the time. Yet, I think in many ways we forget the root causes of it, the mental health issues that come with it. I'll leave it with this, and I'll probably have more to say later on. A November 21, 2025 article – it was in *The Globe and Mail* – "Labours lost: How opioid deaths are hallowing out the construction industry."

The top 10 jobs with highest addictions: Number one, mining, quarrying and oil workers; number two, construction workers; number three, restaurant and food service workers; arts, entertainment and

recreational are fourth. Actually, I don't see where even politicians make it on that list.

But here's the thing, it makes sense because think of the jobs that people are doing. Probably in isolated areas away from family, hard physical labour where you can get injured, where you've got to keep working, people then turn – in this case, this young man died by suicide. So it comes down to we can wage war on the symptoms, or we can wage war on and treat the underlying cause.

I think, Chair, that in any budget as we go forward, I look forward to better health care, but I also hope that better health care means that we're not just simply focusing on the bricks and mortar. I did hear that in the Throne Speech, it's going to be about better health care services, mental health personnel, social workers, physicians, and making sure that people, that if they're dealing with addictions, mental health, if they're leaving the prison system, that they have the supports they need to actually get their life and move on.

Thank you, Chair.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi.

S. O'LEARY: Thank you, Chair.

I want to thank the minister for introducing the bill, the Interim Supply bill, because, as we know, for new Members like myself, it's really important for us to not only understand it ourselves, but also to be able to explain it to the constituents that we represent about exactly what this funding entails.

I want to say thank you very much for bringing that forward and that introduction there. Plain speak is what we need to be talking about so that people can understand what major decisions we're making on behalf of our residents.

In October and since then, sitting in the office of course, we were approached by many residents and grassroots

organizations who were really, really, super stressed out. They didn't know if they'd have enough money to see themselves through to the next budget cycle. There was a lot of anxiety, a lot of stress and certainly there were a few that the minister tackled to try to alleviate that immediate stress, but you know, the unknowns of how much money that people are going to have to be able to maintain the existing programs that they have, it's crucial – it's crucial.

We're not talking about just organizations, we're talking about people – people who actually run these organizations, people who will lose their jobs, single moms, new moms – we saw all of it. These are situations that certainly impact people greatly, and we have to always remember that when we're crunching numbers, there are always people behind this that are going to be impacted.

That was our first hit when we got right into the office and got our constituency all set up and everything, and these were the things that came to our attention. Of course, now we know that we need to ensure that we can maintain the servicing certainly of government departments and otherwise, until we have that wonderful debate that's going to happen with the budget that comes forward.

We're all here to serve our constituents, and I welcome the permanent annual rate of the gas tax to 7.5 cents a litre permanently. Obviously, we want to make sure whatever breaks we can get are going to be enacted. However, it's also really important to note that we're kind of in a holding mode when we do that. It's not really bringing anything new – a new initiative to the table. So it's good. We know we can be solid in that knowledge that that break will be there, but again, we're looking for new solutions especially when we're looking at the debt that we have in the government right now.

There are piecemeal things that keep coming forward, and we know that it's a push and pull and that this is what the debate is all about. We all have our wishes, just as my colleague the Member spoke

about, we're not going to get everything, but it's extremely important that we act on behalf of the people that we know who are truly suffering in our community.

I'm so pleased to hear my colleague here talk about mental health and addictions. For myself as the Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi, mental health and addictions is a massive issue in that particular district because, of course, we are housing so many of the shelters and the organizations that are there to support people who really need to be adequately housed. Everybody needs a roof over their head, but the wraparound services that truly are going to help people get their lives back together again.

Some people will never fully recover. Some people are dealing with addictions and they can recover. They can pull themselves out of it, with supports. There are others who have mental health issues – I know many of them and we all know many of them – who we will need to continue to support for the rest of their lives – people with mental health issues, learning disabilities. We were talking about the Disability Advocacy right now, which is so wonderful to see that coming forward. There are a lot of people who we are responsible to care for. So those conversations need to continue, and I'm really happy to continue that conversation, especially as the critic for mental health and addictions, in my capacity.

The only concerns that I really have is about selective groups getting the benefits. When we talk about the Seniors' Benefit break, that coming forward, of course, trying to do a little breakdown of what that means, knowing that we have about 550,000 people in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador; 25 per cent we know are seniors.

So if we try to break it down – I'm just doing a little math here, trying to figure out. So 137,000 seniors can't possibly access the benefits there. Of that 550,000, there are approximately 137,000 seniors and then only so many within that realm that would actually be eligible as well. So that's great.

Those are great things but, again, let's realize that they're very selective. Not everybody is going to get to benefit from that. Not every senior is going to get the benefit from that.

I also refer to the fact that the minister spoke about a productivity crisis, because I've heard the minister speak about that a few times. I'm somebody who really truly believes that everybody has a level of productivity. Somebody who comes from the disability movement, where every person has the right to be able to work –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

S. O'LEARY: In the labour market businesses, everybody has something to offer. So there is that.

But we do that by lifting people up and then using education as an opportunity to truly help people reach their goals. We need to meet people there where they're at. I really, really think that education is something that is going to be the answer to many of our society's ills. It comes in all kinds of forms. We need certainly to support and to grow our skilled workers, that whole community is fantastic. I have family members who are just budding apprentice welders and things like that. We want to see that thrive.

But we also know that the other post-secondary institutions need to be supported as well. Because humanities and arts are not just frills; they are the things that make up our arts, our cultural community and really bring in the benefit and such to the tourism industry, which we're hearing a lot about these days, and that we want to continue to grow immensely in our province.

I'm jumping around a little bit here because I have an opportunity to talk about a number of different things within this realm. You're going to hear me talking a lot about the importance of the oil and gas industry for the economy, and we're going to see that flesh out certainly in our upcoming debates. The devil is in the details on that. But again, climate change is on our doorstep and we need to invest heavily in things that are

going to invest in us over the multiple generations – our children, our children's children, and continuing on down the line.

I know that the Member across the way here will talk about the seven generations that we need to be caring for. This is something that's really important. So when we think about all of these things, how we continue to invest in people, education is the start of it, but I'm really, really looking forward to what's going to be the guts of the poverty reduction plan, when that comes forward. Because a guaranteed basic income is a solution to ensure that every single person has an opportunity to thrive, and then we continue to grow and build our society from there. There are many jurisdictions that have implemented that particular model. There is a report that's yet to come on the guaranteed basic income. I'm really looking forward to hearing about that, what the details are in that.

The Minister of Tourism, Culture and Arts, I'm sure, would be very interested to hear that in Ireland, of course, the artists in Ireland now, they can access a guaranteed basic income, which means that Ireland can ensure that the artists and the cultural producers, which the Irish country is so well known for, not unlike Newfoundland and Labrador – if we invest in those areas and invest in those people, then they're going to be able to thrive, they're going to be able to create, and then it opens up the whole world to tourism.

So it's just an incredible opportunity for us to really, truly consider this base layer that will actually enhance productivity for all of our people.

The final thing I wanted to just mention was smaller things, again, that could add up – and the NDP have been pushing for it for some time – is the removal of the provincial portion of the HST on children's products. That's an investment in families.

I thank you, Mr. Chair, for this opportunity to speak.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the MHA for Mount Scio.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Chair.

I was going to ask some questions in Committee, but I was informed that – I didn't realize, this setting of a bill, we do that in this format.

So I have a few questions if that's okay with the minister.

CHAIR: Okay.

S. STOODLEY: Okay, so I'll just ask the two at the same time.

We know that clause 3(5), notwithstanding the *Financial Administration Act*, to facilitate expenditures for disaster assistance recovery efforts, that is a new clause that was not in previous bills. I can guess what that is for, but I was wondering if we could hear from the minister, why the new clause in the bill that previous bills in other years didn't have?

Then, I was also wondering if the minister could clarify how they arrived at the numbers for the amounts of the different heads of expenditure. I understand it's 33 per cent, but the numbers vary quite a bit from last year. So I was just wondering if the minister could explain to the House how they arrived at the amounts for Interim Supply under each head of expenditure.

Thank you.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

C. PARDY: Thank you very much, Chair, and thank you for the questions.

On the disaster assistance recovery, we talked of climate change and we talked about Fiona and we talked about the Conception Bay North wildfires. We talked about the erosion of our coastal waters that

we've have. There is no doubt that if we didn't plan for such disaster assistance and events, I think we would be amiss in doing it.

For the Member, that is the basis of which we would have there; it would be a contingency money of sort that would address any disaster that would occur within the interim period, that we would have money at our disposal. The minister would know that, often, the federal government would chime in and contribute monetarily, but it's usually only after we've accommodated the resources and then they would repay us.

Item (3), you had mentioned, contingency, I believe you had mentioned – that's basically in section (3) there for any unplanned or unanticipated expense. One would think that if we really knew what was coming, we would list it there, but we really don't know and, thus, we said that we would have money for contingency just in case there is an unanticipated, unplanned expense in the section (3).

Finally, when we look at the head of expenditure, the question was asked, if we look at the Consolidated Fund Services, which would head that list there, of \$150 million – if we can recall last year, it was \$312 million that was in that figure. Because we put \$200 million for contingency – or your government did at that time, \$200 million for contingency, based on potential impact due to tariffs and such. That was something that was placed in there which really had that a higher figure.

As for every subheading that's there, that would be the departments individually that would look at what they would need for that three-month period, making sure to allow for salary and expenses and maybe inherent in each one of those departments, maybe a little bit of contingency as well, that would be there, but it would be the departments that would come up with those figures.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Mount Scio.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to the minister for explaining that. I note some of the heads are quite different than last year. For example, Transportation and Infrastructure is \$80 million more than it was last year for the Interim Supply. Does that signal the government's priority? Is this the budget coming into Interim Supply? Do these numbers reflect what the government's budget will be, or is this, kind of, another reason why the numbers are increased?

I understand the contingency for the Consolidated Fund Services, but, for example, Education and Early Childhood Development is up \$30 million from what it was last year in Interim Supply.

Thank you.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

C. PARDY: My understanding of the question is that the percentage is taken from the past budget for the first three months, and I think we've got that in record to know what the expenditure was for the first three months, and that sort of gives us the evidence in order to look at what the expenditure would be.

If we look at Transportation and Infrastructure, the Transportation and Infrastructure may have some contractual things that would be paid out in the first quarter, so therefore a percentage of the last budget, and contractual obligations for the first three months.

CHAIR: Are there any more questions to the bill?

Seeing no more speakers, shall the resolution carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, resolution carried.

A bill, "An Act Granting to His Majesty Certain Sums of Money for Defraying Certain Expenses of the Public Service for the Financial Year Ending March 31, 2027 and for Other Purposes Relating to the Public Service." (Bill 3)

CLERK: Clause 1.

CHAIR: Shall clause 1 carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, clause 1 carried.

CLERK: Clauses 2 to 4 inclusive.

CHAIR: Shall clauses 2 to 4 inclusive carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, clauses 2 through 4 carried.

CLERK: The Schedule.

CHAIR: Shall the Schedule carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, Schedule carried.

CLERK: Be it enacted by the Lieutenant Governor and House of Assembly in Legislative Session convened, as follows.

CHAIR: Shall the enacting clause carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, enacting clause carried.

CLERK: WHEREAS it appears that the sums mentioned are required to defray certain expenses of the Public Service of Newfoundland and Labrador for the financial year ending March 31, 2027 and for other purposes relating to the Public Service.

CHAIR: Shall the preamble carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, preamble carried.

CLERK: A bill, An Act Granting to His Majesty Certain Sums of Money for Defraying Certain Expenses of the Public Service for the Financial Year Ending March 31, 2027 and for Other Purposes Relating to the Public Service.

CHAIR: Shall the title carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, title carried.

CHAIR: Shall I report the bill without amendment?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

Motion, that the Committee report having passed the resolution and a bill consequent thereto, carried.

CHAIR: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Chair, I move that the Committee rise, report progress and ask leave to sit again.

CHAIR: The motion is that the Committee rise, report progress and ask leave to sit again.

Is it the pleasure of the Committee to adopt the motion?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, that the Committee rise, report progress and ask leave to sit again, the Speaker returned to the Chair.

SPEAKER (Lane): Order, please!

The Member for the District of Placentia West – Bellevue and Chair of the Committee of the Whole.

J. DWYER: Thank you, Speaker.

The Committee of the Whole on Supply have considered the matters to them referred and have directed me to report that they have adopted a certain resolution and

recommended that a bill be introduced to give effect to the same.

SPEAKER: The Chair of the Committee of the Whole on Supply reports that the Committee have considered the matters to them referred and have directed them to report that the Committee have adopted a certain resolution and recommend that a bill be introduced to give effect to the same.

When shall the report be received?

L. PARROTT: Now.

SPEAKER: Now.

On motion, report received and adopted.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board, that the resolution be now read a first time.

SPEAKER: It has been moved and seconded that the resolution be now read a first time.

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

CLERK: *"Be it resolved by the House of Assembly in Legislative Session convened, as follows:*

"That it is expedient to introduce a measure to provide for the granting to His Majesty for defraying certain expenses of the public service for the financial year ending March 31, 2027 the sum of \$3,985,930,500."

On motion, resolution read a first time.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board, that the resolution now be read a second time.

SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that the resolution be now read a second time.

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

CLERK: *"Be it resolved by the House of Assembly in Legislative Session convened, as follows:*

"That it is expedient to introduce a measure to provide for the granting to His Majesty for defraying certain expenses of the public service for the financial year ending March 31, 2027 the sum of \$3,985,930,500."

On motion, resolution read a second time.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board, for leave to introduce the Interim Supply bill, Bill 3, and I further move that the said bill now be read for the first time.

SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that the hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board shall have leave to introduce Bill 3, the Interim Supply bill, and that the said bill be now read a first time.

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

Motion, that the hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board to introduce a bill, "An Act Granting to His Majesty Certain Sums of Money for Defraying Certain Expenses of the Public Service for the Financial Year Ending March 31, 2027 and for Other Purposes Relating to the Public Service," carried. (Bill 3)

CLERK: A bill, An Act Granting to His Majesty Certain Sums of Money for Defraying Certain Expenses of the Public Service for the Financial Year Ending March 31, 2027 and for Other Purposes Relating to the Public Service. (Bill 3)

On motion, Bill 3 read a first time.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Minister of Finance and President Treasury Board, that the Interim Supply bill, Bill 3, be now read a second time.

SPEAKER: It has been moved and seconded that the said bill be now read a second time.

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

CLERK: A bill, An Act Granting to His Majesty Certain Sums of Money for Defraying Certain Expenses of the Public Service for the Financial Year Ending March 31, 2027 and for Other Purposes Relating to the Public Service. (Bill 3)

On motion, Bill 3 read a second time.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board, that the Interim Supply Bill, Bill 3, be now read a third time.

SPEAKER: It has been moved and seconded that the said bill be now read a third time.

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

CLERK: A bill, An Act Granting to His Majesty Certain Sums of Money for Defraying Certain Expenses of the Public Service for the Financial Year Ending March 31, 2027 and for Other Purposes Relating to the Public Service. (Bill 3)

SPEAKER: This bill has now been read a third time and it is ordered that the bill do pass and its title be as on the Order Paper.

On motion, a bill, "An Act Granting to His Majesty Certain Sums of Money for Defraying Certain Expenses of the Public Service for the Financial Year Ending March 31, 2027 and for Other Purposes Relating to the Public Service," read a third time, ordered passed and its title be as on the Order Paper. (Bill 3)

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Speaker, Order 2, second reading of Bill 1.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Corner Brook.

J. PARSONS: Speaker, in my constituency, I hear from persons with disabilities and their families on a regular basis. Over the last number of years at all levels of government we've taken great strides to be more inclusive but there's a lot more work to be done. Having an advocate in place, will not solve the problems of persons with disabilities unless government commits to take recommendations seriously and make necessary changes.

Speaker, I'm new to this Chamber, but I understand there has been great respect in government for the work of statutory officers and, while changes and recommendations from these offices do get made, there is always more work to do.

For example, back in November, I wrote the Minister of Health and Community Services about the need to implement recommendations in the Citizens' Representative report regarding the challenges of parents and caregivers of medically complex children, called *By a Thread*. The minister assured me that her department is working with the Citizens' Representative on this issue, so I look forward to hearing the progress on this issue soon.

My hope is that our excitement, voiced so passionately on this bill previously, translates not only to advocacy, but to action. To that end, I'd like to share a story illustrating why I believe we do need a Disability Advocate.

One of my constituents – I'll call him John – is a 44-year-old man with an intellectual disability falling within the autism spectrum. More recently, he suffers from bipolar disorder and psychosis. He takes numerous medications to manage these issues, and

he has required constant care to function in everyday life since birth.

His mother passed, 19 years ago, and since then, John's father and sister have taken the reins to give John the best opportunity in life. Unfortunately, John has faced an increased decline in his mental state in the past number of years, which has led to bouts of hospitalization. The family has tried their best to keep John out of the hospital as much as possible, but John was admitted most recently to Western Memorial Regional Hospital, the mental health unit, in February of 2025.

Previously, John had been able to live under the care of his parents and, most recently, his sister and her family. They received limited community supports.

It became painfully evident more recently that John is not able to care for himself and live independently at all. Left alone, he would leave the house at all hours of the night, go out in winter without shoes. His social workers made requests on John's behalf to get full-time care, but they were denied.

As I mentioned, John has been in acute mental health care for over a year now. Someone from his family visits every day; helps him groom and clean himself; takes him out into the community to watch hockey; see his family. Seeing him in the mental health unit with no end in sight is breaking their heart.

Speaker, I want to read part of a letter that John's father wrote last summer.

I left his hospital room yesterday in tears, frustration and disappointment with those who are trusted with his care, but don't really seem to care at all. To watch the torment and anguish that my son is experiencing is one which I can only describe as hell. Watching him cry completely breaks me, but it also gives me the strength to keep fighting for him. The word "fight" is one which I never dreamed I would need to communicate with anyone,

but here I am pleading for my son to have a chance at living.

We are completely lost as a family as to how to help care for him. The feeling of dismissal and lack of options for care has left us stranded in a no-win situation, with a health care system that is failing my son and us miserably.

After multiple written and verbal requests to meet with mental health, community support, our family has been able to get nowhere. Please help my son get a fair chance at life and ensure his safety, well-being, quality of life is at the forefront. He matters. He is not just a patient trapped in a failing system; he is my son.

John's long-term living arrangements have been discussed informally with the family, without a clear assessment of his needs. After requesting formal testing, a capacity report was completed for John. It included the opinion of caregivers at acute care and a more formal, arm's-length capacity assessment by a psychologist and a psychiatrist. Surprisingly, acute-care professionals said John is capable of making his own decisions about finances, safety, personal care and health care. The arm's-length assessment said the exact opposite.

John will not be discharged from acute care, under his own care, yet some of John's caregivers say he has sufficient intellectual capacity to care for himself. John is stuck in limbo.

As I mentioned, John's family has fought for his proper assessments and a plan for his long-term care. They've tried working through patient relations at NL Health Services, with little success. I've tried to help John and his family. I've tried to arrange meetings with NLHS managers to better understand the policies and procedures that affect John's situation but to no avail.

I heard earlier, during Question Period, the minister is eager to help individuals with health care cases like this. So I will be

reaching out to the minister's office on the family's behalf, and I hope the minister will help John find a better living situation.

John's family has been told that John sits in a gap in the system. Persons with intellectual disabilities often do, particularly when they become adults with aging parents and caregivers. Who will speak for John?

Speaker, this is exactly why I will support the establishment of a Disability Advocate. As John's father said, John's family is fighting for him; they shouldn't have to do it alone. But neither should a new advocate. This bill is an excellent step, but appointing an advocate is not enough. It takes follow through on legislation and policy, so I look forward to working with my colleagues in this House to ensure greater equity for persons with disabilities.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

It's a real honour to rise in this House and speak to the establishment of a Disability Advocate. I do take exception to the Member's comments across the way when he says that we do not take disability seriously and goes on to say that this is not enough.

I'll remind the Member that for many, many years that we've been here, we've advocated for more – we've advocated for more – and it was the government across the way that gave us nothing, and I can talk for the Member who's responsible, that he's very committed to doing the best for those who are disabled.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. DINN: This bill, if it's not enough, I can tell you the community sees this as a huge step forward for individuals who cannot advocate for themselves. We are establishing an office that can do that and can investigate. This is a huge step. This comes from many, many, many Question Periods, petitions, PMRs to establish this, to speak up for those who don't have a voice.

Now, I know every Member in this House realize that we have one-third of our population who are disabled or are identified as disabled, and I know we all want to do the best for them because they are just as entitled as anyone in our beautiful province. They need that voice for those who can't speak up.

I think you can't move the meter on this unless you speak up, unless someone can bring your concerns and that forward.

As I said, this has been something that we've talked about for quite a long time, and we've had advocates come in here. Many times, we've had them in the House of Assembly here. I talked about individuals I've known and worked with – Joanne Macdonald is one, a huge advocate for this; Mel Fitzgerald as well. I look at some of these people who struggle to get answers, who struggle to find programs and services and can't navigate the system or have something that goes wrong, you have to have someone they can go to.

I think a Disability Advocate is a huge starting point for them – a huge starting point for them – and they've told us so. They've said it's a huge step forward – a huge step forward. It shows some that we are listening. That goes for everyone in this House, because we're, from what I've understood, all ready, willing and able to support this, and so it should be. That's why it's our first bill, because we see it as so important.

I can tell you, until you walk a mile in their shoes, you never realize the barriers they face. I know when I broke my ankle many years ago, that was a huge challenge for me getting around, driving a standard –

well, you couldn't get around, but I knew that two or three, four months later, I'll be off the crutches and I'll be all back at the same; but there are individuals in our society, again one-third, who face barriers every single day.

Maybe it's not enough; maybe we still have to do more, but, in my opinion, it's a great start. It's a fabulous starting point to help those who are most vulnerable and those who need that assistance.

I coach soccer. When I see young kids and their parents, their child has complexities or exceptionalities, and trying to get them involved into a sport. They may not be the most able bodied; they may not be understanding the game as quickly as others, but they belong. They belong on that field just like anyone else, but in a lot of cases, someone needs to advocate for them.

That's why we've pushed this bill through and brought it as our first bill, because individuals out there need help and we're elected to do that. Each and every one of us represent our districts and the province as a whole. Sometimes we forget, like, simple changes, in the people's House, to allow those with mobility issues to access the House of Assembly.

Who would have thought in this day and age that there were barriers? I know, in many cases, unintentional. But we're not living it every day and for someone who is living it every day who has an advocate that they can go through, who knows what's happening every day, I think that's a fabulous starting point. They can speak from experience. They can speak from knowledge. They can speak from being on the front line and hearing from individuals.

People want a voice and we're the voice for many, but sometimes we're not loud enough or not the proper voice. Because as much as you try, you want to understand the issue, but you may not be able to do it because you haven't experienced it. I think that's what a Disability Advocate brings.

I think when I look at this bill and I look at the discussion we've had so far, everyone realizes that. I can only speak from – and it's not just MHAs here and the ministers who have put the work into this; it's our own public servants. Having served in government for many years, I know what goes into putting these papers together, putting a Cabinet paper together, doing the research, talking to the individuals, consultations that happen on a Cabinet paper, the engagement that happens. I mean, the piece of work they do is so, so important.

The other day when we brought this bill to the House, we had them up in the gallery. We had many representatives up in the gallery. They're not applauding me or the minister or anyone across the way; they're applauding all of us because we're all in support of this. We all saw this as a need, and the Leader of the Opposition, he said the same.

This is something we all need; this is something the disabled community needs – 30 per cent of our population, that's huge. Those are not identified disabilities. There are individuals out there who you may observe and not recognize a disability because there are many out there who don't want to be labelled.

I'll tell you a story. When I worked with Income Support, and it was one of the strikes – I don't know if it was the last one or the one before. So we went in and we worked at the offices to help get the cheques out to those who needed it. It's quite the eye-opener, I can guarantee you. I applaud our social workers. What they do on a daily basis is amazing – amazing.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. DINN: I wouldn't be able to do it. For some of the situations they find themselves in, I wouldn't be able to do it.

But this particular time, during a general strike down on Water Street, in the office on Water Street, we worked to get cheques out to those who needed them because

everything else was gone. So they'd come in and pick up their cheques, or we would help them out by sending the cheques directly to their landlord or so on.

This young gentleman came in, and he was actually part of a news cast the year before. He was a truck driver and he was in an accident, not through his fault, and he had a severe head injury. So he was cognitively impaired and couldn't go back to work, couldn't find a job. He ended up on income support.

He had a lovely apartment that he was renting, and he came into the office and I remember serving him – and again, I'm not a social worker. We see them now as MHAs. We see all types of people, but unless you're experiencing it on a daily basis, it comes natural to you.

This young gentleman came in, and I thought I was trying to help him as best I could. He was very agitated and wanted his cheque. What we were doing, we were trying to send them out electronically or in the mail, and I was assuring this young man that, oh no, don't worry about it. Your landlord will get the cheque, not to worry, and he got even more agitated. He did not want that cheque going to his landlord. He did not want a cheque coming from income support going to his landlord, and do you know why? Because of his own dignity and pride. He did not want that.

It would almost bring you to tears when you listened to him, and he was tremendously upset. He said: You cannot let that happen. I don't want my landlord to think I'm a loser. I forget the word he used, but it was something of that tone. We did everything we could to make sure that cheque didn't get to the landlord, and we put it out.

Something so simple as that, a cheque going out for someone who's disabled, that was a big deal. That was a big deal for him. I think by having a Disability Advocate, it helps deal with those issues, helps address those issues, helps move those issues along – someone who's dedicated, committed to helping those individuals,

which again, everyone in this House, I know we are dedicated to helping anyone who walks in our door.

I always make the comment, I don't care if you got two horns and a pointy tail, if you come in my office, I'm going to help you as best I can. I think we all do that, but there are areas where I'm sure we realize we're over our heads in terms of the expertise that we can offer them.

So by having this position in place, I think it's a huge step. By allowing them to have investigative authority, I think is a huge step. I agree with the Member opposite when he says it may not be enough, but it's a good start. Again, I go back to the Member next to me, and the Premier, I know, who all worked on this. We worked on a PMR last year and we worked on trying to ask questions and all that. I think we all have the best interest of those in the disabled community at heart.

I always say they're not looking for a handout; they're looking for a hand up, and I think a position such as this just strengthens that so much for all of us here – for all of us. It really does. So it's a real pleasure and an honour to get up and speak to this bill, to this office that I hope we'll have established sooner rather than later, and we can build on that. That's a foundation. That's a huge foundation that we can build on.

I hope that as we move forward with this, whoever is in that position – I know if you put the right person in, and I know there are people out there who are looking at this position and wanting to be in this position. I know some of them and I'd look at any one of them, and I say if we get any of them, this office is going to do what it was meant to do and to support those who are not getting the support they need, and be that voice to speak out on their behalf to ensure that someone is there to lobby and advocate for them.

I certainly have no problem supporting this bill, and I am hoping, and I think we are going to have a unanimous decision on this.

Thank you for your time.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Leader of the Third Party.

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, yes, we'll be supporting this bill for sure.

Earlier today, I gave a Member's statement on Margaret – or Muggs – Tibbo and her involvement with parasports, Paralympics, Parasport NL. If anything, she has been an advocate for those who, because of physical disabilities, may have felt excluded and are now able to be part of it. I think some of the stories that she had relayed to me, not just the fact that the child could take part, but the pride in which the parents felt that they were included as well is significant.

I think of our cousin Mary – Mammie, as we would have known here – and her adult son Johnny, who takes place in the Newfoundland Special Olympics, a fantastic athlete, a snowshoer. I would say he could out-snowshoe anyone here, but the fact is you think about how rich his life was is as a result of that inclusivity and the pride with which his mother feels for him, and certainly all of us in the family.

When I did my teaching degree back between 1976 and '81, I remember I did two special education courses and one of the books we had to read was, at the time, *Is My baby All Right?* Which basically listed all the things that could possibly go wrong: congenital birth defects and so on and so forth. Put it this way, after reading it, it was enough to make you not want to have children when you considered the things that could go wrong, but they still affect a small part of the population. As part of that course, we volunteered over at Exon House.

At that time, Exon House was basically an institution where a lot of children who had a variety of mental illnesses, disabilities, neurological differences, physical who were

more or less housed, I guess. Then came that move to include people into the school system and into society; remove them from the institutions. Fantastic idea because, at the time, it meant now that people who should have been part of society were no longer excluded from it. With it, of course, comes the need for supports.

I remember at Holy Heart, I think, one of the first times I was teaching a person who was on the autism spectrum. Now, this is high school and I don't think I've ever had a student – this young fellow of 15 – who ran his hands through my hair at that time because it looks so soft. And I've got hair to run my hands through. But I will say this –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

J. DINN: Yes, it was a lot longer back then and a lot less grey but I guess, in many ways, when you get accustomed to the differences in people, you start to learn to adapt to it, accept and to adjust to that.

We know that 27 per cent of Canadians live with a disability and up to 31 per cent of Newfoundland and Labrador. Okay, so we know that it's a significant part of the population. We also know that they face barriers, additional costs, those living with disabilities are disproportionately more likely to live in poverty. Though only 27 per cent of the population are people with disabilities, they make up an astounding almost 50 per cent – 41 per cent of people living in poverty across Canada, which is why, when we're discussing guaranteed basic income, it wasn't about one size fits all, it had to do with the need. So, basically, a guaranteed basic income for people living with a disability would be significantly different.

We know that in the past people with disabilities have been unintentionally excluded, especially if they need specialized transportation, equipment coaches and so on and so forth. We know that in the past the Coalition of Persons with Disabilities stated that even when consultations were done, government didn't always listen to their perspectives and needs. I'm

encouraged then, in a way, this is an attempt to at least address that wrong.

The Minister of Energy and Mines and the Government House Leader said yesterday, I thought he said very clearly – and I thank him for that – that we, as a society, have failed disability communities for a very long time, and just because you can't see it, doesn't mean a person doesn't have a disability. I think we have in many ways, and hopefully we're getting better.

I'll say this, and I've got to end with – well, halfway through it anyway, I don't want to get your hopes up yet – I can't help but think that there are a number of examples over the last couple of years that I've seen that probably would benefit from having a Disability Advocate, I believe, and there are issues that came across my desk and people I know.

I think of the Carter Churchill case, Kim and Todd Churchill, who fought for years, at great expense to themselves, to make sure that their son, Carter, had the supports he needed. It took a human rights case to finally settle that.

I heard in the hearings basically what I've always known: the don't ask, you're not getting it approach, where the district didn't ask because they knew that the departments responsible would be: no, you're not getting it, make do. Yet, it took a human rights case to get them to act.

I think of Rhonda Whalen. All these are people I've brought up here in the House or have been in the media. Rhonda Whalen, the woman who lost her leg, an amputee, who lived in a St. John's city house and, because of this, had lost the custody of her grandniece that she was the legal guardian for.

She had to spend almost a year in a two-story house, downstairs. The bathroom was upstairs; she had no way of getting up there. She had to use a commode. She had to basically take care of any personal hygiene in the same sink that she used for cooking. It took over a year to get her

moved to a place on one level, where she could at least have access to just toileting, so that she could have the situation where she could get her child back – unacceptable, a year. Even to get the city, at that time, to put a lock on the door was a fight.

I think of Shirley Cox, the person who was in Riverhead Towers. Again, smoking outside the front entrance because she couldn't get her wheelchair down to the smoking hut where everyone else went who was mobile. She was evicted.

I think of Keane Place. When I brought up in this House, I think it was last year, the fact that they had been without an elevator for almost three years, which meant that there are people in there who are trapped, basically, if not in their apartment, on the same floor for those years. They had no way of getting out. We had people who suffered heart attacks because they were lugging their groceries up and they had mobility issues.

Neither the government at the time here, the provincial government, nor the municipal government, nor the fire department, seemed to have the ability to address this issue. It took residents drawing attention to it to finally get to embarrass, I guess, into action, but it should never have taken them, when you look at it, 2½ years or three years for that to happen.

I think of Anne Malone, another disability rights activist talking about sidewalk clearing. This is a city issue, but I would say it's probably any area where people are forced to share the highway with vehicles. Now it's one thing if you're able-bodied – and I've watched this on Kenmount Road where the traffic speeds by, and all those people, they're not necessarily people from the city – it's quite another if you are in a wheelchair or if you have to use some other mobility device.

I think of a constituent I helped with trying to get 24-hour home care for her adult sister who's in need of it and the fight that it took just to get that.

I think of the fight at the time and the advocacy that was needed to get Newfoundland and Labrador Housing to modify a shower for a person in a wheelchair.

I guess what I'm looking for in this office is not only is this office going to address systemic change and change the attitudes and the approach to realize that when it comes to solving some of these issues, we've got to invest more money, but it's also about each one of these people would not need to fight a year or more or go through an expensive human rights case to get the issue solved. I'm hoping in this advocate, that it's going to be able to deal with, not only the systemic issues, but the individual issues because each one of these people here have endured a lot. They were powerless.

The only fact that I guess in many ways that they got attention is that they had an MHA speak for them, and it should never have come to that. Actually, it really shouldn't have to come that – to be honest with you, when you come right down to it, we really shouldn't need a Disability Advocate, if we're a society that's inclusive, but here we are.

I support the idea. I hope that what we're going to see is more support for people like Muggs and her work. We're going to see the supports that are needed for people to get around independently, whether that's more public transit, that we're going to make the transportation more accessible.

I've listened here in this House of Assembly to the other side when they were in Opposition talk about the 1.6-kilometre bus rule and the safety hazard to children getting to school in a rural area. I would agree, and I actually say that's problematic in town at times as well. That's all about making sure that people are safe; that people can access education, in this case.

What I really want to see here, and I'm getting the feeling that this is the case, that this office is able to do both and it will have the resources it needs to do this work,

because I really think the people I've just mentioned here should not have had to put up with the struggle that they've had to endure to just get some basic rights, mobility rights, inclusivity.

With that, Speaker, I'll take my seat. I will support the bill. I hope that this is going to accomplish what I hope it's going to accomplish.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. FORSEY: Thank you, Speaker.

It's a privilege and an honour to get up here today and speak about this Act Respecting the Disability Advocate.

I know over the years we've advocated for it and asked for an advocate because we saw the challenges that a lot of people faced, the people with disabilities especially. They came to all of our offices, all the MHAs' offices, looking for supports, looking at where to go and all we could do was put them along the way and hope that they found the solution to their problems.

I'm going to say that, in 1982 – there's a gem in Central Newfoundland called the Lion Max Simms camp.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. FORSEY: I spent 27 years as a Lions member. I'm very proud of that camp.

I saw the way – and over the years I've worked with them – a lot of the people with disabilities, autistic, blind, people with mobility issues or other challenges, when you bring them into that camp, when you bring them in, they all become families. They feel warm and welcome because they have somewhere that they can go to feel that way. With that – by working with them

in that way – they become and have become very productive members of society, because of the support that they've gotten through local organizations such as the Lions Clubs.

I know over the years we've heard stories, and we've heard stories from MHAs right here in our own House of Assembly only in the past few days, of wishing that they had the support of a Disability Advocate to get some supports that they could get.

It's great to see this disabilities act, Bill 1, coming into place, and I'm certainly in favour of it, because it's something that I've seen along the way that people with challenges, with disabilities, they go to offices, they're turned away. They don't know where to go. So somebody to speak for them, that's what they need.

We've already heard the stories, many different stories, of how the need to speak for them. Sometimes they maybe don't have the confidence to speak for themselves because of their challenges, but working with them as individuals, we can move them into very productive members of society and give them to be part of society the way they want to be and want to feel. That's what this act will do, and –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. FORSEY: – and to have someone there to speak on their behalf – and not only speak on their behalf, but to follow up on the situation, to investigate the situation that they're in.

That's what means a lot to some of those people. If they didn't get the support they needed, if something didn't happen – I know they mentioned the wheelchair accessibilities – that's where someone could go in and look at the wheelchair accessibilities and make sure that this stuff is happening along the way. They can report back to that person. They can feel confident in that person, so that they can relate to that person. Once they gain the confidence of other individuals, of other

people, then they have confidence in themselves and they become confident with other people within society.

Seeing this Disability Advocate being put in place, it's certainly a great bill to be speaking about here today because I know that I've seen people, I've had family members with disabilities – not that they needed the Disability Advocate at the time; there was other people around for them, to speak for them, to help them along the way. They had that, but there are not so many people as fortunate, probably, in other times that they do need supports, where that advocate can certainly help them along the way, put them in through doors and places and supports that they need so they can find the solutions to help them along the way.

So it's good to see that we're putting this bill into place, that we can have the support for people with disabilities in that way.

Speaker, I'm not going to speak a long time on this one. It's just that I wanted to get up and say that, people with disabilities, if we gave them supports and the options and the solutions and the advocates to speak on their behalf, they can become productive members of society. I've seen it a number of times. All they need is help, and this is a big part of that help; a Disability Advocate, to help them, again, along the way, know the directions to point them into, where to steer them to and how to get there and, hopefully, that will help them along the way, make their lives a lot easier.

With that, Speaker, I'll let somebody else have a turn. I just wanted to say that seeing the way that disabilities work, people with disabilities, and I've worked with people with disabilities through the Lion Max Simms camp, I know how they feel. They've asked me the same questions over the years, especially when I got to be an MHA, then they'd call me to find out where they could go or what to do.

So seeing this today for people with disabilities, it's a pleasure to speak on it and I certainly support this bill.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl North.

L. STOYLES: Thank you, Speaker.

I got my headset in; I've got to take it off.

I couldn't resist the pleasure to stand up and speak about something as important as this bill is to me as someone who's spent a lifetime advocating for people with learning disabilities, and I've heard many stories about my colleagues here in the House of Assembly being able to advocate for their children and for other people.

Well, Speaker, I've spent my lifetime, or well over 25 years, involved with the Learning Disabilities Association of Newfoundland and Labrador, but first I want to talk about some of the pioneers that got us here, people like Glenn Roy Blundon from my hometown in Bay de Verde. The Blundon Centre at MUN is named after him. He passed away in 1984 at the age of 26. I remember him walking around our small community in his wheelchair. Then he went to university and the barriers got even worse; the challenges of him getting to his classes. So during the wintertime, he would use the tunnels.

His story is still in print for people to read, a very courageous story. He couldn't use the tunnels because there was something that happened and he couldn't get through, so he went to the Memorial's organization for disabilities, it was dormant for over 20 years. So through the MUN student council, they reacted it and through Glenn, he was able to advocate and get other people inside. When he passed away, they named the Blundon Centre after him.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. STOYLES: A courageous young man. His family still talks about him in the community. The Blundon Centre, when you

go there, there are still things in the centre on Glenn Blundon.

Stephen Gerald Coombs, another great advocate in our community. He passed away in 2014 at the age of 40. He left our province, after going through university and struggling with his disability, moved to North Carolina to live independently on his own.

Then we have Stephen Lush – Tom Lush, former Member of the House of Assembly. Stephen had a helicopter accident and ended up with a brain injury. Speaker, nobody knows what it's like to have a brain injury until it happens to you or somebody in your family. Well, Speaker, my daughter had a moose accident and had a brain injury. Sometimes it's very difficult to talk about, but I always say until it happens to you.

We've worked very hard to advocate on behalf of people who have moose accidents in this province and thanks to people like Eugene Nippard; Art Puddister; Peggy Roche, a former councillor in Torbay; and Linda Bishop, my good friend who passed away just a couple of years ago, were great advocates for Save Our People Action Committee.

Actually, Linda Bishop, on her own, got the Rick Hansen van that Rick Hansen drove across this country for Ben Bellows who had a moose accident and had no transportation to get back and forth to St. John's to his appointments because he was out in Mount Moriah and he couldn't get back and forth – very difficult. He was in the Miller Centre for a year and a half and when he went back home, he didn't have transportation to get back and forth. Linda Bishop, on her own, did all the work, put the application in and was able to get the van to Newfoundland, that the Save Our People Action Committee gave to two other people after Ben Bellows passed away.

Then I want to mention Jennifer Lythgoe. Jennifer was born with spina bifida. Marilyn

and Dave Lythgoe, not only are they pioneers, they are the heart and soul of our community in Mount Pearl. They worked tirelessly to make sure that Jennifer was getting the support she needed. Imagine if Jennifer didn't have her parents to fight, where would they be today?

So it's great to see that we, finally, are able to have an advocate to fight for people like Jennifer and other people in the community.

I certainly wouldn't be able to stand here today without talking about Marie White Ryan. Myself and Marie became friends through meeting her through COD – consumer organizations for disability. Her, Mary Ennis and Joanne MacDonald became good friends of mine. I got to know them through the Learning Disability Association as I served on the board, representing the Learning Disabilities Association on many committees with those people.

I also want to mention Nicole Kieley, one of our own who struggled, who is struggling now after having a life-changing accident. Here she is now finding her life turned 180 degrees and, like I said, until it happens to you, nobody will ever know what it's like.

Now I want to go back to the Learning Disabilities, where I started over 35, almost 40 years ago. Actually, it's probably a lot longer than that, sometimes I don't remember how old I am, and I don't want to some days, but I want to talk about the Learning Disabilities Association and all they have done in this province for children with learning disabilities. It's known as, unless you can see it, no one really understands because there's nothing wrong with your child.

Max Batten, Judith Davis, Patricia Fuchs, Geraldine Frost, Daphne Baker and now Lynn Green, all presidents of Learning Disabilities. Victoria Bellman was the first president of MUN for Learning Disabilities. All those people are pioneers in our

province, and we should not and can not forget everything that they have done in this province.

Barbara Hopkins and Gertie Andrews – there used to be a unit at the university called the diagnostic unit. Barbara Hopkins ran that unit and Gertie Andrews was the person, the only person – there were only two of them down there – that worked in the unit. Well, my son wouldn't be where he's at today only for Gertie Andrews because it took two years to get him in there, and fighting to get him in sooner, before he was eligible to get in, but I kept fighting.

I met with the Minister of Education at the time, Minister Hearn, and knocked on his door and wouldn't leave until he came to talk to me. That's when my advocacy started. I spent many, many years going into schools. I was responsible for getting money to stay in school, money through the federal government to help children in this province after school; there was nothing. After they finished school in June, there was nothing for them. When they went back to school in September, they were after forgetting – or most of them, unless they had someone home to help them, there was nothing for them.

So we got stay-in-school money. We started and formed nine chapters in Newfoundland and one in Labrador for learning disabilities across this province. I spent almost three years travelling every nook and cranny in this province. I was so happy that, every chapter we'd start up, VOCM came on board with the Cares Foundation and gave us \$500 so there was seed money for every single chapter. Then we got government grants to hire students every single summer so that these children, when they got out of school, they could have one-on-one tutoring over the summertime.

So, yes, it certainly is needed here in this province and, I always say, about time. I know other governments have come close to doing something like this, and we, as the

Liberal government, had started this process the past number of years. I have talked to my colleagues about it, the same thing as I have talked to them about the moose fencing and convinced them to put moose fencing up and to continue the moose fencing along the highway.

So I'm very honoured to stand here today and support this bill.

Thank you, Your Worship.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Speaker, I move, seconded by the Member for Lake Melville, that the debate be now adjourned.

SPEAKER: It's been moved and seconded that the debate be now adjourned.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Speaker, I move, seconded by the Member for Lake Melville, that the House do now adjourn.

SPEAKER: It has been moved and seconded that this House do now adjourn.

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

This House do now stand adjourned until tomorrow, Tuesday, March 10, at 1:30 p.m.

On motion, the House at its rising adjourned until tomorrow, Tuesday, at 1:30 p.m.